

*Musical
Uproar
in Moscow*

ALEXANDER WERTH

MUSICAL UPROAR IN MOSCOW

NO ONE in this country knows present day Russia as well as Alexander Werth, who spent seven years in Moscow as newspaper correspondent and as B.B.C. commentator.

"Musical Uproar in Moscow", his first book since the war, raises questions of the most controversial and topical kind. It contains the whole story of the Communist Party's onslaught on Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Russia's other leading composers, early in 1948, complete with the amazing verbatim report on Zhdanov's three-day conference with the musicians. This episode is examined with first-hand knowledge in order to illustrate the conflict between "art for the people" and "art for the few"—a question of vital interest both to Russia and to the West. At the same time the Soviet case against highbrow art and artistic élites is stated objectively.

Alexander Werth relates the whole story to Communist policy in realms other than art and music, whose "reform", regardless of the cost in genius and talent, is part of the Soviet attempt to create a "brave new world" of Communism, radically different from "decadent" Western civilization. The position of the creative artist is often tragic in a strictly regimented society, and this book provides an astonishing insight into some of the ugliest sides of Soviet officialdom.

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in Moscow*

by

ALEXANDER WERTH

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To A. D.

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OVERTURE

I

Art for the People?

WHAT constitutes, or should constitute, the rôle and function of the creative artist in modern society? Even in the free democracies of the West the question arises; and in France, for instance, the matter is already being widely discussed, well beyond the narrow limits of small literary coteries. But the issue is posed more sharply from the Soviet angle. The Soviet Union is a revolutionary force; for thirty years it has been challenging the West in political and economic matters. In the last three years, it has also challenged the West in the field of literature and art.

At the World Congress of Intellectuals, held at Wroclaw in August, 1948, the Russians made a great demonstration. Fadeyev in the rôle of writer, but speaking, in reality, as a high functionary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, proclaimed that "if hyenas could use fountain pens, and jackals could use typewriters, they would write like T. S. Eliot". Although no man is less qualified than Fadeyev, who knows no English, to pass judgment on English poets, it still remains arguable whether poetry that is both pessimistic and obscure (as some of T. S. Eliot's poetry undoubtedly is) is a good thing to have in the modern world.

Not that Fadeyev *argued*: the author of *The Young Guard*, that most typical of all the primitive novels of the "Zhdanov Era", simply *condemned* T. S. Eliot. In his blunt, crude, and arrogant way he told the Western world and the Western writers and "intellectuals" exactly where they got off. But since the Polish hosts, of the Congress were obviously upset by all this, the Russians had the unfortunate idea of treating the audience to European, urbane and Frenchified Ilya Ehrenburg. The substance of his speech was not very different from Fadeyev's; he denounced American Imperialism as the source of all ills, but

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subsequently spoke in mellow, conciliatory tones of "the common heritage" of European culture (including Russian), adroitly paraded Pushkin and Tolstoy, and tried, in effect, to suggest that Russian artists and writers and Western artists and writers should all be boys together. The Western hearts melted; Fadeyev is ill-bred and ignorant, they said; but Ehrenburg—oh, he is so brilliant, and he loves France so dearly. As long as there are Ehrenburgs in Russia, there is hope for a common cultural front.

All this was dishonest, and thoroughly confusing and misleading. Ehrenburg kept putting his arm round Picasso and telling him how he admired his great genius, and how bad, how very bad was that stuffed monster, the painter-laureate of the Stalin régime, Gerasimov. And he cracked jokes at Gerasimov, in Gerasimov's presence—jokes in French which Gerasimov did not understand. And yet, when you saw him at off-moments, you could not help noticing a strange, furtive look in his tired, puffy eyes. He was like an old man with a bad conscience. He was writing dreary, scarcely readable novels now, receiving Stalin prizes for them; and they were like imitations of Fadeyev—crude, primitive, and not even popular with the well-conditioned Russian reader. He was doing it perhaps out of the conviction that, whether one liked it or not, the Zhdanov Era of literature had set in for some years to come, and the wise man accommodated himself to it. Yet his recent books ring false, and many Russian readers, ready to be inspired by Fadeyev, are conscious of the false ring of Ehrenburg's war novel, *Storm*.

And so, to deceive the Western intellectuals, he went on embracing Picasso, telling him how the Russians loved him; what he did not tell Picasso was that *all* his paintings, including some of the best, were under lock and key in Russia, and were not shown to the public because they were "degenerate" and bad for the young to see.

Why did nobody in the Congress have the sense to ask Ehrenburg point-blank: Why is Soviet music represented here, at Wrocław, by a mediocrity like Khrennikov? If he had been honest, he would have had to say that the world-famous Big Four were in the dog-house, that the Party had decreed that they were

not to be treated as great composers any more until they had mended their ways, and that they could not be trusted to be sent abroad, not even to Poland, in case they said the wrong thing. And somebody might perhaps also have put the question to the Soviet delegation why the spokesmen of Russian literature at Wroclaw were Fadeyev, Ehrenburg, and Zaslavsky, and not a really great writer like Sholokhov whom they had brought there for window-dressing, with orders on no account to open his mouth? For suppose the author of *Quiet Flows the Don* had suddenly proceeded to explain what it was, under the Zhdanov literary régime, that was cramping his style, and why he had not written a single book for more than ten years? Why had his great war book, of which one saw only a few tiny, but admirable samples, not been completed and published?

Instead, old man Zaslavsky, looking like a grandfather penguin, talked about the great intellectual freedom in Russia and the immense amount of debating and discussing. Debates? Yes; but at the end of every vital debate the Communist Party *decrees* who is right and who is wrong. We have seen it in the case of economists, and geneticists, and others. The readers of this book will see how this *free* discussion took place among the musicians, and how the debate ended.

Fundamentally, the two reasons why all this is so are that (a) a new type of humanity, entirely different from bourgeois humanity, must be produced in the Soviet Union through a long process of conditioning, in the course of the next generation or two, in preparation for full-fledged Communism; (b) with war against America and Western Europe not entirely out of the question, Soviet humanity must be taught to hate the bourgeois and Social-Democrat West. And, this being so, all the Ehrenburg talk about intellectual interchanges, common heritage, and all that, is singularly unconvincing.

In saying this, I am far from suggesting that the Russians are entirely wrong in their war on pointless, anti-social, and escapist art and literature. I believe, on the contrary, that the Russian concept that art should not be limited in its appeal to a narrow *élite*, deserves the closest study. For let us not pretend that all is

well with Western art and literature. What then is the Russian approach?

The writer, in Stalin's phrase, must be the "engineer of human souls". Literature, in post-war Russia, is expected to be *functional* and *educative*: its purpose is to *inspire* the readers to acquire and develop a Party-consciousness, a Soviet-consciousness, and all those other civic and political virtues with which the heroes of modern Soviet fiction are so richly endowed. Literature has become a sort of School of Citizenship which teaches you to love your Soviet country, to be a good Communist, to love Stalin, to hate the American Warmongers, and to despise everything foreign that is not distinctly pro-Soviet. The success of a novel or a play in Russia is not left to chance, or to the whims of the reading or theatre-going public. If the Government and the Party approve of a play like Simonov's *Russian Question*, it will not only be played in 600 theatres throughout the country, but will also be turned into a film, which thousands of cinemas will show. Very few foreign countries were tempted to translate Fadeyev's *Young Guard*—a dreary hack-work in which the heroic passions and deeds of the underground resistance organisation in the mining town of Krasnodar are described with the literary finesse of Ethel M. Dell. Nevertheless, as Fadeyev boasted at the Wroclaw Congress, two million copies of this work have been published in Russia. If the whole propaganda machine of the State boosts a book, and the book is distributed, more or less free, to every schoolchild in the country, then nothing is easier than to become a best-seller. Only how much finer and truer a book, with real characters of flesh and blood, would Sholokhov have made the *Young Guard*, had he been commissioned to write up that wonderful wartime episode!¹

But that is not the real problem. In Russia, many a man has told me that Fadeyev's prize novel and most of the other prize novels produced since the Central Committee's Decree on Liter-

¹ I must qualify this by saying that, despite the dismal standard of writing, Fadeyev's book has a freshness and a naïve nobility of sentiment which has an effect, especially on young Russian readers. Also, the last few chapters are well written; and even those who find the novel generally dull and naïve, are moved to enthusiasm and tears when they see the *Young Guard* on the stage or the screen, with good actors giving life to Fadeyev's ill-drawn characters.

ature in September, 1946, following Zhdanov's celebrated attack on Zoschenko and Anna Akhmatova, are all "pretty poor stuff". Yet the same people thought that *eventually* a new type of literature, not only civically constructive, but also *truthful* and *unprimitive*, might emerge. That is the question. Can Russia produce once again, under the direction of Zhdanov's successors, a mirror of truth and beauty like that once fashioned by Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Turgeniev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Leskov, Chekhov, and Gorki? Will Soviet literature, under this system, even produce another Sholokhov, now that the present Sholokhov—for reasons only too easy to guess—has been silent for over ten years? Or is one to conclude that, under a well-ordered Soviet system, there is really no room for great individualist poets, for novelists writing of internal human conflicts, for painters who paint anything other than strictly realist—Socialist-realist—pictures in which preferably Lenin and Stalin figure, for composers who write anything more highbrow than songs and operas with an *immediate* appeal even to the most untrained ear?

It is a problem for Russia; but it is also a problem for the West. The Russian, especially the Zhdanov, statements of doctrine in these matters are exceedingly crude; and therein perhaps lies their principal weakness. In France, where there are many more serious Marxists than in England, the Zhdanov doctrine has been a source of endless embarrassment; as one eminent French Marxist admitted to me: "A lot of the Zhdanov *fundamentals* are perfectly sound, and there is no getting away from them; but the way he applied them, and, above all, the way he *formulated* them—oh, my God!"

Yet the crux remains: no "getting away from it", no getting away from the question whether, in post-war society, "incomprehensible" painting and "incomprehensible" poetry are desirable (a) from the point of view of the community, and (b) in the interests of the development of art generally. Discount, as you like, Russian talk about the blind alleys and the dead ends of Western art: is it desirable that art should be produced that would be too detached and divorced from reality not merely for the Third Programme, but even for the Tenth Programme, if there

were such a thing? The Russian authorities challenge even the Third Programme, and want all art to be "popular"—for the People. It is not a question of raising the literary standards of the People, but of lowering the standards of literature, just as in England we find a marked tendency in some papers to lower the standard of writing to the lowest level of intelligence—with the qualification, the Russians would say, that while popular Western journalism caters to the lowest instincts of the People, Russian literature is expected to cultivate, among the uncultivated, the higher instinct of Communist citizenship.

Of course, the fact that anybody should be uncultivated is a very temporary thing; under Communism, we are told, "everybody will be cultured and educated". And it is for this uniformly "cultured and educated" People that the art of the future is being prepared by Zhdanov's successors. No *élite*; no highbrows; no Third Programme listeners looking down on "Light" listeners. That is where the Zhdanov thesis becomes dangerous and full of tragic implications for the creative artist.

Soviet theorists have always dwelt on the great social rôle and social content of Russian literature and art in the past. They have often strained the argument unduly. While dwelling on the "progressive" and even "revolutionary" importance of Pushkin and Lermontov, they have tended to neglect some of these two poets' greatest work—their lyrical poetry; and such personal gloom as they have discovered in their writings has been conveniently attributed to Tsarist oppression. The importance of Turgenev is found in his "socially significant" novels like *Rudin* and *Fathers and Sons*, not in his more finely written *Alya* and *First Love*. Chekhov is also credited with all kinds of social, civic, and even revolutionary virtues which he scarcely possessed. Such criteria are even applied to music. Tchaikovsky's pessimism is either simply denied, or else attributed to the oppressive atmosphere of Tsarist Russia.

None the less there is, generally speaking, a certain amount of truth in the contention that all the great Russian writers of the past had their feet well planted in the Russian soil, and very few, except the "decadents" of the early years of this century, could be justly described as "escapist". It is certainly true that "Art for

Art's sake" was never in the classical Russian tradition; nearly all Russian writers have been—at times, if not consistently—interested in what might roughly be called the Destiny of Russia. The social motif is present even in a "love story" like *Anna Karenina*, or in Dostoevsky's expeditions in search of God. Marx himself would have pounced eagerly on the minute description in *Crime and Punishment* of slum conditions in St. Petersburg, and treated it as a first-class sociological document. And when it comes to discussing classical foreign literature, your contemporary Russian critic, while attributing to Shakespeare all sorts of "democratic" thoughts which Shakespeare never entertained, will also, and not without some justice, say that the most valuable and, ultimately, the most permanently important writing, is that which is not divorced from reality and is endowed with some degree of social significance. To these Russians, the greatest names in English and French nineteenth century literature are, of course, Dickens and Balzac. Indeed, if Galsworthy—realist chronicler of the bourgeois world—were still alive and writing to-day, and G. B. S. were at least a little more active and youthful, the Russians might not talk as glibly as they do of the decay of English literature.

Not that their opinions need be taken too seriously. Frequently they have not troubled to study the European literature of to-day, and the opinions they profess to hold on this or that present-day writer are often not worth the paper they are written on. For instance, in *Bolshevik*, some months ago, one Central Committee scribe talked about the degeneracy of present-day England as exemplified by that *newly-published* poem, *The Waste Land*! Yet, when all is said, is there really room for mere hedonistic esthetes in the England of to-day? That is a question which must some day, and before very long, be answered. Thus in James Agate's *Ego* 9 under a 1947 dateline, we find:

It may be that the elegance and comfort should go if the result is an additional penny an hour on the collier's pay. *I am just not interested in the working conditions of the coal mines.* What I am interested in is a first-class performance of the *Rosenkavalier* with a bottle of champagne at the Savoy afterwards.

I am not alone, I think, in being nauseated by this; nor does one need to be a Communist to feel queasy. The old men of the Café Royal do make you feel, not that Zhdanov was right, but that there is an incontrovertible basis of truth in the Russian case, however much we may admire Prokofiev and Shostakovich, Pasternak and Akhmatova, and however badly and outrageously the whole case may have been stated by Zhdanov himself. He and his successors may cause endless harm to Russian literature and Russian music if they continue to go so clumsily about it. But the West cannot afford to ignore some of its own weaknesses; and it is not enough to sneer at Zhdanov's theses and to pretend that all is well with Western art and Western literature. We cannot afford to ignore Russian ideas on literature and art any more than we can ignore their ideas on politics and economics. All of them are dynamic forces in the world to-day.

Can the Western World, in its struggle for the survival of its way of life, afford to wallow in hedonism, pessimism, escapism and catastrophism? In France, in the Munich days, I used to read Céline, one of the most popular writers of the last years of the Third Republic. Reading Céline, I could feel 1940 coming; and Céline was not alone in shattering France's faith in herself.

I am not advocating State control of art and literature. Heaven preserve us from that. But that there should be a self-imposed sense of purpose in art and literature is something worth considering. World War II has produced more good films and more good and vital writing in England than the Russians suspect; and the writing is neither escapist nor, as were most of the books produced during and after World War I, defeatist, pessimistic and cynical. But much of it is still smothered under tons of trash. Of course, our conception of trash may be different from the Russian. Thus, Somerset Maugham has been declared trash by the Russians, whereas, to the Russians, Priestley is about the only serious—fairly serious—novelist England has still got. Where do we draw the line?

When the "Formalists" were "Geniuses"

THIS little book deals, in the main, with one particular episode in the history of Soviet art policy since the war. It is the most startling episode of all; for it is concerned with Music—the art, one might have thought, least liable to provoke discussion in terms of ideology and social significance. Can one be surprised if the Central Committee of the Communist Party, having laid down the law, first on literature, then on the theatre and the cinema, then on philosophy, only very much later got down to the problems of music?

In all the Central Committee's cultural reforms since the war, its spokesman was the late Andrei Alexandrovich Zhdanov. It was he who, in September, 1946, made two violent speeches in which he denounced Zoschenko for his "cheap heehawing" at Soviet reality, and Anna Akhmatova—"half-nun, half-harlot", he called her—for living nostalgically and ego-centrally in the past. That she wrote some poetry of rare beauty did not concern him. In his two Leningrad speeches, he not only said what literature in future would be considered "anti-Soviet" and would not be tolerated; he went much farther, and defined as clearly as possible what kind of books *must* be written. Soon afterwards, he became the moving spirit behind the reform of the cinema and the theatre; once again, the decrees not only said what kind of films and plays *must not* be, but what kind *must* be produced. In the summer of 1947, Zhdanov publicly tore to pieces the *History of Western Philosophy* by G. F. Alexandrov, still at that time one of the ideological chiefs of the Central Committee. He decreed, in fact, that henceforth pre-Marxist philosophy must be treated on an entirely different plane from Marxist philosophy; for Marxist philosophy alone was scientific, while all pre-Marxist philosophy was merely speculative. Such was the gist of his argument. This crude over-simplification deeply embarrassed foreign Marxists; but Zhdanov did not care, any more than he cared when a similar decision was taken by the Central Committee,

headed by Stalin himself, declaring one school of genetics to be 100 per cent. right, and another school of genetics (though represented in Russia by many eminent scientists) to be 100 per cent. wrong.

In their decisions on literature, the theatre and the cinema Zhdanov and the Central Committee did, in fact, little more than harden a Government and Party policy which had, in practice, been pursued for many years. But the Reform of Music in January-February, 1948, was much more startling and revolutionary. For here was a case of knocking down idols who had been built up and worshipped for years by the Party and Government press; and the theory Zhdanov put forward, that the great reputations of Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian and Miaskovsky had merely been built up by "a clique of sycophantic critics" and racketeers was simply not true. In September, 1944, *Bolshevik*, the organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, had proclaimed Shostakovich's 7th Symphony to be the work of a genius of the first magnitude. Later, *Culture and Life*, another organ of the Central Committee, expressed some disappointment over Shostakovich's 9th Symphony; but it still referred to him as "the composer of immense talent, of whom our Soviet country is so justly proud".

It was, somehow, generally accepted by everyone in Russia, whether they liked symphonies or not, that the Soviet Union was miles ahead of any other country in this branch of music. It was commonly said that the West had stopped producing great orchestral music, but that in Russia this form of art was flourishing as it had not flourished in the West for fifty years or more. When Shostakovich's 7th Symphony was accepted only with reservations by critics in Britain and America, the Russians were outraged. The Soviet propaganda organisations had boosted it abroad as a work at least as great as anything written by Beethoven. Madame Kislova of V.O.K.S. (Society of Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) snorted at the very suggestion that there were any living real composers outside the country of Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Khachaturian, and Miaskovsky. Stalin Prizes were showered, year after year, on the Big Four; Prokofiev scarcely knew what to do with all that

money. Then, suddenly, in January, 1948, Zhdanov was given the extraordinary job of explaining to the country and to the world at large that it had all been a dreadful mistake, a terrible racket, and that the great composers of Soviet symphonic music were little more than a bunch of artistic spivs, un-Soviet and even anti-Soviet in their activities, "anti-People", formalist, divorced from reality, and, in short, unwanted by the peoples of the Soviet Union.



Before dealing in detail with this remarkable performance, it may be useful to recall here what Professor Asafiev, the leading authority on Russian music, wrote, as late as 1947, about some of the leading Soviet composers. Asafiev is a serious scholar of musical history, and one who has received, and continues to receive (after his strange *volte-face* in February, 1948) every possible honour from the Party and the Government. In a volume devoted to Soviet Music (*Ocherki Sovetskovo Muzykalnovo Tvorchestva*, 1947) he wrote the longest and most important article of all, namely, that on "The Soviet Symphony". This article is all the more interesting as the official party line as laid down by Zhdanov only a few months later was that symphonic music was the weakest and most sinful field in all Soviet musical activity.

What then did Asafiev say? Here are a few of his judgments.

Soviet Symphonic Music

The greatest creative achievements in the whole realm of Soviet music are concentrated in symphony. The most powerful and most original Soviet composers have concentrated their energies on this field. . . . The great revolutionary struggle of our people, the building of Socialism in our country, the gigantic upsurge in all fields of human activity, the mighty growth of artistic and scientific thought in our country—all this is reflected in our music; and all that was best and most important in this respect we find in the music of our symphonists.

So much for the "formalism", for the alleged divorce of the Soviet symphonists from Soviet reality. Asafiev then went on:

There were successes; there were also failures. . . . But I repeat that the level of symphonic thought and of the most important, style-determining works has been very high indeed throughout. . . . Soviet symphonic music is our glory and our pride, because in our country alone did symphonic music not lose its head. . . . Nor was it guilty of the eccentricities of Western composers.

In the West, they have for many years been living on the great symphonies of the past; but here, in the Soviet Union, the symphony continues to be the vital expression of the loftiest thoughts and deepest emotions; what has been done shows that there is an inexhaustible will in our country to create great art in this field, an art that is full of content and eloquently reflects the heroic past and present of our country.

Miaskovsky

Soviet symphonism was tempered like steel in the storms of the revolution, and the first epoch-making symphony of our era was Miaskovsky's Sixth, written in 1922, and rich in deep and dazzling thoughts on our country's new destiny. . . . It is hard to determine precisely when the transition took place from the pre-revolutionary to the revolutionary symphony, from the intelligentsia symphony to the Soviet symphony, with its absolutely new qualities. But this transition is most clearly marked in Miaskovsky's Sixth. The pre-revolutionary symphony was, civically, essentially *peaceful*, despite the feelings of personal joy and pain often strongly expressed. But, in Miaskovsky's Sixth, the music quivers, not with personal anguish—though, naturally, it has its subjective side, too—but with a more general anxiety for life, in all its completeness. In the Finale we hear the marching of masses of men and their energies are not merely the energies of a crowd: they are the energy of organised masses. . . .

Miaskovsky's symphonies are like a chronicle of our Soviet era. More than representing humanity as a whole, they represent *our* people with all their joys and sorrows. Take, for example, his Eighteenth Symphony celebrating the Twentieth anniversary of the Revolution, or his Kholkoz Symphony, or his Twenty-first (Red Army Anniversary) Symphony. . . . Miaskovsky has an armour of

firmly-disciplined consciousness, and always a powerful and profoundly thoughtful personality. . . . He is like a general watching the battle from some distance, and keeping a firm control over everything. . . . He has precision and clarity, and architectonic qualities of the highest order. . . . Symphonies must be composed slowly, through a long process of selection and digestion, and it is all the more amazing how vitally connected with our everyday life Soviet symphonies, like Miaskovsky's, are. . . .

The October Revolution did not result in a rapidly maturing dilettantism, but in a high degree of professionalism. In the revival and consolidation of the national school of symphonic music, an immense rôle was played—professionally, creatively, and ideologically, by Miaskovsky. . . . He is a great master of melody, melody largely inspired by Russian popular *melos* rather than by intense personal lyricism. . . . Yet he can be lyrical, too. His Twenty-first (one-part) Symphony is one of the most fragrant flowers of his lyrical genius watered from the centuries-old springs of human anguish, and reminiscent of Lermontov's desired—and yet—undesired peace. . . .

Shostakovich

The Finales of both his Fifth and his Seventh Symphony are inspired by the throb of millions of hearts. . . . You reflect on the Slow Movement of the Seventh, with its profound, penetrating wisdom; and you suddenly realise, as you react with both mind and heart, that that is just how we *all* felt in those days of passionate anguish in the summer of 1941. . . . The music here speaks in the language of Shostakovich, but it renders the feelings of those who went out to defend their city against death. . . .

In his greatest moments, Shostakovich writes music which we accept as the emotional language of Soviet reality. One cannot but be proud of a talent, so unique, so nervously-original, and so universally significant. . . . In the symphonism of Shostakovich all that is *thematic* is also *current* and *development*, and sometimes the theme dissolves entirely in the musical stream, or else is gathered into the condensed intonation of a *cry*, an acclamation of alarm or joy, a spasm of pain or a thrill of delight. . . . There is a frenzied perception of life in all this.

Here it may be recalled that, in the course of all the discussions

surrounding the Decree of February 10, Zhdanov never ceased harping on how Shostakovich had "ignored" the warning given him by *Pravda* in 1936. But speaking of this *Pravda* attack, Asafiev wrote:

The *Pravda* article in 1936 on Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth*, which reminded us that we must not neglect the great traditions of music, has borne wonderful fruit. And the most remarkable thing is that this article contained no attack on Shostakovich (as our enemies tried to make out); it was, on the contrary, a defence of the most gifted of all our composers against the errors of æsthetic formalism and naturalism which are essentially so alien to him. *If the Bolshevik Party, with its fatherly directness and care, had not pointed errors out to Shostakovich, would he have created those immensely human symphonies which are the admiration of the whole world?*

Prokofiev

The seething, inexhaustible talent of Prokofiev. . . . He has a deep feeling for the Russian soil. . . . He is full of Russianisms, and labels like neo-classicism or neo-romanticism are quite irrelevant. . . . He continues to have infinite curiosity, and his perception of life can be so fresh and youthful as though it were all new to him. . . . Shortly before the October Revolution, I remember, Mayakovsky said to me one day: "I can react these days only to Prokofiev's music. At the very first sounds I feel that life has burst in, or a mountain torrent, or a torrent of rain, and I get right under it and cry: How fine, how wonderful; let's have more, and more, and more of it!"

These quotations suffice to show how an undisputed authority like Asafiev—a very fine scholar of Russian music and musical history—reacted to contemporary Soviet composers. Later, Zhdanov, and the new pundits of the Composers' Union, claimed that Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Miaskovsky, and Khachaturian had been artificially built up by "sycophantic, boot-licking critics" who had made out of publicity for these composers a profitable commercial racket. There is, however, no difference between the views of the "sycophants" and Asafiev's judgments on the Big Four. They represented, in fact, the general reaction of the cultured, musical public of Moscow, Leningrad, and the

other great cities of the Soviet Union. And this love for, and pride in, the Big Four applied just as much to their chamber music as to their symphonies. Opinions might differ about some works, such as the dynamic and pianistically amazing, but melodically poor, three piano Sonatas of Prokofiev; but much of his piano music was rapidly taking an honourable place in recitals alongside with Schumann, Chopin, Brahms, and the other classics, and was indeed largely supplanting old popular favourites, such as Liszt and Scriabin. And it is not as if any of this music was unintelligible to the average cultured concert-goer; it all had its firm thematic and melodic pattern, and could not be put in the same category as, say, Schoenberg. Indeed, Miaskovsky, in the judgment of the more "Leftist" part of the musical public, was, if anything, on the conservative, traditional side.

The case of Shostakovich, of course, presents a number of special problems; and, in a sense, it is understandable that the greatest fury of the Central Committee should have been directed against him. His approach to the outer world is extremely personal and emotional, and his sensitivity is of a peculiarly delicate kind bordering at times on the neurotic. His Eighth Symphony, which was damned with faint praise from the start, was indeed—with its cries of pain and anguish—a reflection of his over-sensitive (according to heroic Soviet standards) reaction to the horrors of war, just as his piano trio, inspired by the accounts he read of Majdanek Annihilation Camp, was like a heart-rending musical description of such a camp, with the concluding *allegretto* like a Jewish *danse macabre*. And there is undoubtedly a feeling of profound tragedy, bordering on pessimism, in his wonderful Third Quartet, where the personal anguish of a modern Soviet man is, first, fitted into the pattern of a Bach-like Largo, and, in the Finale, into that of a Beethoven Rondo. This is about as far removed from the Piatnitzky Choir of Song and Dance that Zhdanov loved as are the *Missa Solemnis* or Beethoven's late Quartets. . . . In short, the whole thing was un-Soviet, introspective, and as bourgeois as anything Beethoven himself would have written had he arrived in Soviet Moscow. It just didn't do.

The Trouble Starts

THE way it all started was rather odd. On 7th November, 1947, the Soviet Union celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the Revolution. It seems that the leading Soviet composers did not take the thing seriously enough. Shostakovich, in his spare time, wrote a sort of fantasy on some of the most popular army songs and other ditties; but he was more interested in thinking out his Tenth Symphony and a violin concerto. Miaskovsky, who had written many works "for the occasion" in the past, did not bother this time. Prokofiev was too busy completing his Sixth Symphony, which he himself thought as good as the Fifth; it was going to be played in Moscow for the first time on 25th December, and was to be followed, on the same night, by a Symphonic Poem by Khachaturian—this one very specially written in honour of the thirtieth anniversary of the Revolution. (It turned out an unhappy idea.) Finally, in the last days of December, there was going to be the *première*—at a "closed" performance—of a new Soviet opera by a mediocre, youngish composer, Vano Muradeli, a Russified Georgian. This also had been "specially" written to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Revolution.

December 25th was just an ordinary working-day in Moscow. For the British there it was still Christmas; but the new Prokofiev symphony, conducted by the great Leningrad conductor, Mravinsky, was something not to be missed, even if it meant arriving late at Sir Maurice Peterson's Christmas Party. For a fortnight ahead all tickets had been sold out, and I had to resort to a ticket-profiteer and pay three times the marked price. On the stair, leading up to the hall, I met one of the V.O.K.S. critics, a man called Sneerson, who wrote a lot of articles boosting Soviet music for publication in the United States. "I heard it in Leningrad," he said. "It is wonderful; better than the usual Prokofiev. It is philosophic, has the depth of Shostakovich. You'll see!" (Poor Sneerson; for a long time after that concert nothing was

heard or seen of him, until finally, many months later, he emerged in a musical magazine with an article—denouncing the degeneracy of American jazz!) But in December, 1947, Sneerson still ranked as an authority on Soviet music, and the programme notes of the Sixth Symphony were written by him; he talked about the depth and lyrical pathos of the first two movements—qualities which, he said, had long been suspected in Prokofiev, but which had now blossomed forth as never before. . . .

It is one of the most beautiful, most exalted of his works, imbued with the creative spirit of Soviet humanism. . . . It is a great landmark not only in the art of Prokofiev, but in the whole history of Soviet symphonism. . . . This great work shows once again how immeasurably superior Soviet music is to the music of the capitalist West, where symphonism has long ceased to be an art of lofty ideas and high emotionalism and is now in a state of profound decadence and degeneration. . . .

In analysing the themes and development of the work, Sneerson said that while it was not programme music, it nevertheless “reflected the deep feelings of Soviet humanity after war and victory”.

I would hesitate personally to comment on a symphony after hearing it only once, except to say that, after the slow and, for Prokofiev, unusual first two movements, one of which had a strange intensity at times almost reminiscent of Skriabin, there came the exuberant, joyful, wildly humorous finale in the best gay-Prokofiev tradition, which made you sit back in your chair chuckling and chortling. The symphony was never to be played in Russia again; it was condemned out-of-hand by the authorities as “formalist”. How many times, one wondered, could they have heard it? And what kind of authorities on music were these “authorities”? On the day after the concert, *Pravda* published a short notice saying that the audience had been “very appreciative” in listening to the Prokofiev and Khachaturian works.

This, in fact, was not quite true; nobody cared much for the Khachaturian “Poem”, which was a noisy, bombastic *tour de force*, with the organ playing full blast nearly all the time and twenty-three “trombone soloists” blaring away, in addition to

the usual orchestra. Whether "formalist" or not, it was crude and eccentric. But beyond that brief *Pravda* notice, nothing more was said in the press about the two new Prokofiev and Khachaturian works. It was obvious, during those last weeks of December, that "something was up". Inside the Composers' Union, at the Bolshoi Theatre and elsewhere, some kind of row was going on. The general public knew little or nothing about it; but musicians, when one talked to them, seemed uneasy. Some whispered that things were working up to some sort of crisis, though few knew what the real trouble was all about; above all, no one suspected that the Party was preparing to strike a blow of such shattering force. Perhaps, as in 1936, when *Pravda* attacked Shostakovich for his opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, this or that work would be singled out for abuse and derision; but no one thought that all Russia's most famous composers would be thrown off their pedestals.

Yet it happened. And it began, in the strangest way imaginable, over Vano Muradeli's new opera called *The Great Fellowship*. It had already been tried out in the provinces; and, since no one thought Muradeli anything but a third-rate composer, no one could get particularly excited at the prospect of seeing his opera—even at the Bolshoi Theatre. The *première* took place some time about the New Year, and it was a "closed" performance. It is said that Stalin attended; certainly Zhdanov was there, with some five hundred other people—members of the Central Committee and others. Zhdanov later claimed that it was a "sufficiently cultured" audience to appreciate the faults and virtues of a new opera. How "cultured" the audience really was may be surmised from the remark made later in January at Zhdanov's conference of musicians by Livanova, the distinguished musical historian, who said she was unable to get a ticket for the Muradeli *première*, "even though all kinds of people from the Food and Fish Ministries were there". Anyway, Stalin or Zhdanov, or both, did not care for the new opera; and it seems that, at the end of the performance, there was an ugly row, so ugly that Leontiev, the Director of the Bolshoi Theatre, had a heart attack, and died.

Only a very short notice appeared in the press, simply recording his sudden death. Nothing was said about the closed per-

formance of Muradeli's opera, but soon the news began to seep through that there was, in the musical world, "just one hell of a row". Then, suddenly, works by modern Soviet composers were omitted from concerts. Richter, the best Soviet pianist, was to play Prokofiev's new (Ninth) Sonata; when the time came, he played some Schubert instead—without explanation. Worse still, some arrests were made amongst some familiar figures in the musical world. This was no doubt intended to be a salutary warning to the rest. And then, before long, it was learned—this was about the middle of January—that an important conference of composers and musicians was taking place in the building of the Central Committee of the C.P. under the chairmanship of Zhdanov.

Various apocryphal stories about this meeting—for instance, that Prokofiev was sitting on a piano stool at this meeting, with his back rudely turned to Zhdanov—began to circulate in Moscow. Moreover, the Party also used at that time its technique of rumour-launching, which had already so successfully worked at the time of the monetary reform in December. All kinds of people started saying, nobody knew on what basis, that Zhdanov was a most accomplished musician, and a graduate of the Leningrad Conservatory. This "fact" had never been recorded in any official biography of Zhdanov, and the suddenness with which this now became common knowledge was peculiar. Later inquiries showed that there was not a word of truth in the story; but the public nevertheless acquired the idea that Zhdanov was a great musical expert. That he was no expert was admitted at the Composers' Congress in April even by the sycophantic Zakharov. "Comrade Zhdanov," he declared, "is no professional musician. But oh, how well he knows folk song! When he recently visited our Piatnitzky Choir, we asked him: 'Is it true Comrade Zhdanov, that you know 600 folk songs?' 'No,' he said, 'not 600, but I suppose I do know about 300.' How much better our composers would write if they knew folk songs as Andrei Alexandrovich does!"

The Decree

At last, on 10th February, the papers published the Central Committee's Decree on Music. It was a most extraordinary document, and much grimmer than anybody had anticipated. This, and the verbatim report of Zhdanov's conference with the musicians are the two basic documents in the whole case. The Decree, chronologically, followed the conference, but the report of the conference, which, in fact, explains the background of the Decree, was not published until later; and therefore I propose to give a summary of the Decree first.

It started with an attack on Muradeli's opera. The music, it said, was poor and unexpressive, and without a single melody or aria one could remember. "This opera is chaotic and inharmonious, full of continuous discords which hurt one's ears. Some allegedly melodious passages are suddenly broken off by noises unsuitable to normal human hearing. . . . The vocal side of the opera produces a feeble impression." Further, Muradeli had failed, in writing this opera, to make good use of the songs and the dance tunes of the peoples of the Northern Caucasus, or to learn from the experience of the classical Russian opera, "which is rich in content and melody, and is marked by elegant, beautiful, and clear musical forms which have made the Russian opera the finest opera in the world, and a form of music particularly loved by the people".

After criticising the libretto for having misrepresented the historic facts of the Civil War years in the Caucasus (there was no enmity, the Central Committee asserted, between the Russian and Georgian peoples at that time, as the libretto makes out) the Decree goes on:

The Central Committee considers that the failure of Muradeli's opera is the result of his having followed the formalist road—a road that has been so pernicious to the work of Soviet composers. As long ago as 1936, in connection with Shostakovich's new opera,

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk, the formalism and anti-people perversions in Shostakovich's music were sharply criticised by *Pravda*. . . .

Despite these warnings, and despite the Central Committee's more recent decisions on literature, the cinema, and the theatres, Soviet music has so far failed to pull itself together. The occasional successes of a few composers who have written songs which became popular with the people, and the music written for some films, etc., do not alter the general picture.

● The state of affairs is particularly bad in the case of symphonic and operatic music. The Central Committee has here in mind those composers who persistently adhere to the formalist and anti-people school—a school which has found its fullest expression in the works of composers like Comrades Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Shebalin, Popov, Miaskovsky, and others. Their works are marked by formalist perversions, anti-democratic tendencies which are alien to the Soviet people and their artistic tastes.

Typical of this music is the rejection of the basic principles of classical music, and the preaching of atonalism, dissonance, and disharmony, which are alleged to be signs of "progress" and "innovation"; the rejection of so important a thing as melody; and a striving after chaotic and neuropathic discords and accumulations of sounds. This music savours of the present-day modernist bourgeois music of Europe and America—a music which reflects the *marasme* of bourgeois culture.

The Decree then deplores the excessive interest shown by these composers in instrumental music and their "un-Russian" lack of interest in vocal music.

Ignoring the best traditions of Russian and Western classical music, which they treat as "out-of-date", "old-fashioned" and "conservative", and haughtily looking down on those composers who conscientiously try to adopt and develop the methods of classical music as advocates of "primitive traditionalism", and representatives of "epigonism" . . . many Soviet composers are also ignoring the requirements and artistic tastes of the Soviet peoples, and are happy to live in a narrow circle of specialists and gourmets. Disregarding the great social rôle of music, they are content to cater to the degenerate tastes of a handful of estheticising individualists.

Here is really the crux of the matter. Music for the few, or music for the people? But what the Central Committee, or rather Zhdanov, who obviously wrote the Decree, did was to oversimplify the whole matter to a monstrous extent, by attributing all kinds of crimes (atonalism, for instance) to composers like Prokofiev and Miaskovsky, who are scarcely ever guilty of them, and by denying the existence of melody in composers who are extremely rich in melody—at least in most of their works—as are Prokofiev, Miaskovsky and Khachaturian. If Shostakovich is not a melodist in the primitive sense—"a tune you pick up and hum rightaway"—he is, nevertheless, in his later works (e.g. his Third Quartet) a melodist of rare distinction, though his melodies are no more "sing-songy" than are, say, the melodies of the *Waldstein*, or the later Beethoven Sonatas. Equally significant are the patronage given by Zhdanov to those who "conscientiously try" to copy Russian classical music and the protection he gives them against the contempt of the highbrows, who consider it old-fashioned to be imitative. Small wonder that the small fry in the Russian musical world promptly behaved like a pack of hounds released by the Master's hand. Years of accumulated envy were to be used by Zhdanov as a most effective weapon for downing the Big Four.

After deploring the fact that composers are insufficiently interested in writing choral music, songs, opera, and popular music for small orchestras, the Decree proceeds:

The divorce between some Soviet composers and the people is so serious that these composers have been indulging in the rotten "theory" that the People are not sufficiently "grown-up" to appreciate their music. They think it is no use worrying if people won't listen to their complicated orchestral works, for in a few hundred years they will. This is a thoroughly individualist and anti-people theory, and it has encouraged some of our composers to retire into their own shell.

This calls for comment. Throughout this whole controversy on music, one fact stands out: Zhdanov did not, at any point, give the slightest thought to so fundamental a question as

musical perception by the listener. He constantly referred to the great popularity of Tchaikovsky. Why, he kept asking, was the public not so fond of modern composers? The answer is simple. Scarcely any musical work "registers" right away with the listener. In the past, the Soviet authorities understood this; they did not allow music critics to write about a new work until they had heard it four times. Tchaikovsky's Symphonies are popular because they are familiar; to listen to them requires no great mental effort. What chance has a new Prokofiev or Miaskovsky Symphony of becoming really popular—in the sense that Tchaikovsky or Rachmaninov is popular—if it is played once, or twice at most, by the Moscow radio? Even a simple tune requires to be heard several times to "catch on", as we know only too well from the Hollywood technique of "plugging". Much of the work of the Big Four is not "easy", though—with the exception of some of their earlier, eccentric and experimental works—it is not as a rule, shapeless, atonal, unintelligible, or lacking in melody. Far from it; Prokofiev's *Ode to Stalin* for instance, has one of the fairest and noblest melodies in all music.

Another question to which Zhdanov gave no thought is that of musical culture. His criterion of a work (a very unfair criterion) is: "the People like this", or "the People don't like this". The idea of raising the musical tastes of the people is ignored. Yet a question inevitably arises: would not the People, like more "advanced" listeners, sooner or later reach a point when they would prefer an invigorating mountain climb with Prokofiev to the familiar Turkish bath of Tchaikovsky? That is, provided they had the chance to become sufficiently familiar with modern music.

Possibly this may have occurred to Zhdanov; but since he had clearly no desire himself to cultivate advanced musical tastes, he considered that it would be an unnecessary, harmful luxury to develop such tastes and interests among the people. In this he was, of course, consistent: since literature, plays and films were expected to make a mass appeal and, as far as possible, an immediate appeal to the simplest and least refined reader and spectator, the same criterion should apply to music. Yet there was something extraordinarily arbitrary and irresponsible in the

tributes he paid to the "classical heritage". Actually, your untrained *kolkhoznik* on his farm would be as acutely bored by a recital of Bach Preludes and Fugues as by a Shostakovich symphony. But, for Zhdanov, Bach was a "classic": the criterion of "popularity" no longer holds good.

The most comic example of this inconsistency is provided by the case of Skriabin. If ever there was a composer who suffered from *all* the vices which Zhdanov attributed to Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, and Miaskovsky, it was surely Skriabin, who was guilty of atonalism in the most extreme form, disharmony, acute and morbid "neuropathic" egocentricity, total un-Russianism in his themes; and who was, in fact, more "anti-People" than anything in the whole of Russian music. But not Skriabin was sacrosanct—a classic, who was lucky enough to die in 1915, two years before the Revolution. Had he been still alive to-day, one shudders to think what Zhdanov would have said. But when somebody called Steinpress very reasonably pointed out in an article in *Soviet Literature*, at the height of the controversy, that if ever there was a degenerate formalist of the worst sort, it was Skriabin and that Soviet listeners should be saved from the degrading experience of having to listen to him, the "low-brow" pundits of the Composers' Union rose like one man to the defence of Skriabin, and publicly called the ludicrously consistent and over-zealous Mr. Steinpress an ass.

The Decree went on to say that the influence of the formalists, especially Shostakovich and Prokofiev, was having a disastrous effect on the training of new musicians; in particular, the Moscow Conservatory (with Shebalin as its director) was a hotbed of formalism. "The work of many of the pupils of the Conservatories in the Soviet Union is blind imitation of Shostakovich and Prokofiev." The critics, too, were blameworthy for praising these composers' subjectivism, constructivism, extreme individualism, and the professional complexity of their musical language—contrary to all the canons of Socialist realism. Finally various Government and other organisations must be held culpably responsible for the dominant position the "formalists" had acquired.

The Organisational Committee of the Union of Soviet Composers became a weapon in the hands of the group of formalist composers and a source of formalist perversions. On the Committee there was a stale and rotten atmosphere, and an absence of creative discussion. The leaders of the Organisational Committee and their hangers-on, the critics, have been praising all kinds of anti-realist and modernist works to the skies, while realistic works, notable for their endeavour to continue the great classical traditions, were being dubbed second-rate, generally ignored, or treated with contempt. Composers who claim to be arch-revolutionary in their music acted, on the Committee, like ultra-conservatives, full of haughty intolerance towards the slightest criticism.

All this, said the Decree, was intolerable.

In recent years, the standard of our people's musical taste has risen very high. The Soviet people expect from their composers works of high quality and high ideological content—whether they be operas, symphonies, songs, choral works, or dance music. In our country composers have unlimited creative possibilities, and all the conditions necessary for a glorious future of musical culture. Soviet composers have an audience the like of which no composer in the past ever had. It would be unforgivable if they did not avail themselves of these rich opportunities and did not turn their creative efforts along the right road of realism.

The Central Committee therefore decrees:

- (1) To condemn the formalist tendency in Soviet Music as being anti-People and leading to the liquidation of music.
- (2) To propose to the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. and to the Government Art Committee that they take the necessary steps for improving the state of affairs in Soviet music, and liquidate the faults enumerated in the present decree. . . .
- (3) To call upon Soviet composers to become more conscious of their duties to the Soviet people . . . and assure a great upsurge of creative activity which would lead to the creation of high-quality works worthy of the Soviet people.

Needless to say, though it caused real consternation among a

large part of the Moscow intelligentsia, the Decree was said by the Press to have delighted "the Soviet People". To prove this, *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, and other papers published, for three or four days, a spate of letters from workers and *kolkhozniks* congratulating the Central Committee on what they had done. The theme of these letters was always the same: "Why is it that, when I listen on the radio to the Piatnitzky Choir of Song and Dance, or to bits of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, I really enjoy myself and when I listen to all that modern stuff of Shostakovich and Prokofiev, I don't?" As an example of "bad" music, Shostakovich was more frequently mentioned than the others. Significant again; for against Shostakovich Zhdanov had a particular spite. He was too subtle, too delicate a personality to tolerate in Moscow, 1948. The fact that he was completely Russian, and completely Soviet, having spent all his conscious life under the Soviet system, and having scarcely ever been abroad, made it all the worse. Moreover, Zhdanov had a vague feeling that Shostakovich, though completely Russian, was also a typical product of Leningrad—a city that he, Zhdanov, had saved from the Germans, but which he had always suspected of being too independent-minded and rebellious at heart. That delicate boyish face, with its pale-blue eyes that seemed to know so much, was irritating. It is perhaps no accident that the Central Committee's 1946 Reform of Literature should have started with Zhdanov's attack on the Leningrad writers.

The Arbiter of the Arts

ZHDANOV was, in his way, a great man. He was made of the stuff of which State-builders are made; and his whole life was devoted to strengthening the Communist Party and the Soviet Union. He had an immense sense of purpose and a touch of the ruthlessness of Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Lenin, and Stalin. Physically, he had the face of a cat: cold, cruel eyes, a receding cat-like forehead, a cat's mouth, and a small nimble body with cat-like movements. But he had tremendous energy and a fanatical belief that he was doing the right thing.

He was not a boy from the plough, or a boy from the workshop; his father was a Tsarist Inspector of Schools in the Province of Tver, with the rank of Actual State Councillor—the Civil Service equivalent of a Major-General. According to Zhdanov's biography, he became a Bolshevik in 1912, at the age of sixteen. His background was nevertheless that of the old intelligentsia, and this—psycho-analysts might argue—perhaps accounts for his passionate determination to speak always as a representative of the “common people”. Certainly it is hard to imagine that, with his middle-class upbringing, he could have been quite as primitive in his literary and artistic tastes as he claimed to be. Like all schoolboys of his generation, he must have had his spell of enthusiasm for the Symbolist poets of the time—those very poets whom he denounced in his 1946 Leningrad speeches with such crude and unintelligent abuse, deliberately distorting out of all recognition the literary history of Russia during the ten years before the Revolution.

In 1917 he became, in a small but determined way, one of the builders of the Soviet State. After Lenin's death, he became a fanatical Stalinist, spending the following decade—mostly as Party Chief of the Gorki Province—eradicating every kind of heresy. He hunted down Trotskyists and, in the trade union movement, the followers of the Tomskey school of thought, with their insufficient subservience to the State. As a literary dictator

he won his spurs in 1932 when, on one important occasion, he acted as spokesman of the Central Committee.

Stalin trusted him completely: and when, in December, 1934, Kirov was assassinated, Zhdanov was appointed to succeed him, as the Party Chief of Leningrad. There he kept an eagle eye on a city which was rightly reputed to be a little too particularist and independent-minded, lacking reverence for the Kremlin. Indeed, the highly-skilled working-class of Leningrad had a certain contempt for the "sloppy" Moscow worker. And it was typical of this representative of the Kremlin that he should have singled out the Leningrad writers for his snarl: "Enough slobbering over Tzarskoie Selo and the Bronze Horseman! This is the City of Lenin, not of Peter the Great!" His numerous other functions at that time included that of being the Soviet representative on the then seemingly moribund Comintern.

Then came the war. Zhdanov, with his proven energy and devotion, was given the desperate task of heading the defence of Leningrad. Perhaps only a ruthless man could have succeeded in this. In a military sense, it is true, Leningrad was saved in the nick of time by General Zhukov, whom Stalin rushed there after Voroshilov's spectacular failure to stop the Germans from reaching the outskirts of the city. In a few days Zhukov, with Zhdanov's help, fully reorganised the badly demoralised army, and the front was stabilised in some places only about a mile outside the city boundary. But as great an ordeal was yet in store. There were at least two million people inside Leningrad; and, in the bombing attacks of August and September, 1941, nearly all the food stores were destroyed. Some people were evacuated by air; but with the Germans at Tikhvin, on the east side of Lake Ladoga, the blockade was complete, and the situation was becoming desperate. In November, Zhdanov calculated that if Ladoga froze over sufficiently hard and Tikhvin were liberated, it would be possible, by the end of January, to run a regular motor road across the ice. But there were two months to wait. Zhdanov had enough food for two months' iron rations; but what if a premature thaw set in, or if it became, for some other reason, impossible to start the Ice Road? His job was to save Leningrad, and so he decided to make the two months' iron

rations last four months. In the lower category of ration cards, people were given three ounces of bread a day, and nothing else. In practice, it meant that, to hold Leningrad without running unnecessary risks, several hundred thousand civilians must die of under-nourishment. It was a hard decision to take; but Leningrad had to be saved. Zhdanov took the decision. It is the supreme example of his tremendous sense of purpose.

There is a pleasant little interlude in Zhdanov's harsh career when, after the armistice with Finland, he suddenly appeared in the rôle of a diplomat, as head of the Allied Control Commission in Helsinki. As the defender of Leningrad, he cannot have had any tender feelings for Finland. And yet, State policy demanded that he should behave charmingly to the Finns—and he did. Not that he lacked emphatic self-importance when in Helsinki, but he was charming, none the less. On his first arrival there, he had a two-hours' meeting with Field-Marshal Mannerheim; and although, during the war, Mannerheim was proclaimed in Russia to be a Fascist monster, second only to the Nazi chiefs, Zhdanov's conversation with Mannerheim was perfectly friendly and reasonable. He was also very amiable to the British members of the Control Commission, and the impression many received in Helsinki was that Zhdanov was "a very shy man". The story I heard from one Finn was that, at a Finnish Government reception, a lady addressed Zhdanov in French. Zhdanov answered in perfectly correct French—and then blushed like a young girl. One wonders why. Was it not because speaking good French to a lady was so much out of character with the "tough" Bolshevik leader who was the only acceptable Zhdanov to Zhdanov himself?

For Zhdanov, unlike most of the Soviet leaders, was really very self-conscious, and strove for personal effect. He loved being trenchant and outrageous, and loved to say memorable things—memorable in the worst sense of the word. He said too many things which will not bear future quotation. In this respect he was not a good candidate for Stalin's succession. His sharpest and most uncompromising utterances were not limited to his discourses on art and literature; he was equally uncompromising in what he said, at the first Cominform meeting, in the autumn of

1947, on the international situation. His statement was a more emphatic declaration of ideological war on the West than any other Soviet speech; and, although his speeches at the Cominform meeting in June, 1948, which condemned the Yugoslav leaders have not been published, one can well imagine that they were as ruthless and as uncompromising as his speeches on literature, music, and the division of the world into "an imperialist and an anti-imperialist camp". The little, cat-like man seemed to delight in terrifying others with his political power and the strength of his personality. That is the impression one receives from the verbatim report of the three-day conference of musicians over which Zhdanov presided in January, 1948—a report which constitutes the background of the Central Committee's Decree of 10th February, summarised in Chapter IV.

Zhdanov meets the Musicians

THE report of the conference of musicians is of outstanding interest in that it allows the reader to peep through a window of the Central Committee's headquarters. He can watch one of the highest members of the Politburo preside over a "free discussion" by people, many of whom are, obviously, in hearty disagreement with him, but many of whom are, also, extremely nervous and almost hypnotised by his presence. Some, like Shebalin, the director of the Moscow Conservatory, who feels that he has been unjustly attacked, both as a composer and an administrator, speak up boldly and counter-attack. Not, indeed, Zhdanov—nobody dares attack him or question his judgment directly—but he "lets go" at some of the "popular music" representatives, who have Zhdanov's full support. Speeches of a high standard are made by a few, notably Knipper, gifted young composer both of popular hits like *Polushke-Polye*, and also of distinguished symphonic works. But, in the discussion, Zakharov, composer of pseudo-folksongs, is triumphant. Not only does he know that the popular song writers are now going to be officially proclaimed the most useful and valuable members of the musical community; he wants to make sure that the highbrows, who have been receiving so much attention and adulation, shall be proclaimed useless parasites. The Central Committee meeting is the hour of his revenge: he announces, with venom and glee, and with obvious approval from Zhdanov, that *all* the symphonic music written by the Big Four is worthless.

That Zhdanov fully approves of this line may be seen from the fact that, in his two speeches, there is no reference to a single achievement in that field; the implication is that all that the symphonists have written is, if not bad, at any rate, *unwanted*. Zakharov also feels that he will now hold a high administrative post on the Organisational Committee of the Composers' Union, and will from there actively dictate musical policy to the other musicians. It means the end of the *laissez-faire* régime, in which the Big Four,

more interested in composing music than in musical politics, were at the head of the Composer's Union. That they tended to look down on the small fry is, of course, true; and the whole Central Committee discussion gives one an insight into the hatred, intrigue, and envy that existed among the members of the Composers' Union. And how jubilant and bursting with *schadenfreude* the envious lowbrows now were! Typical of this attitude is that of Khrennikov, who had written a couple of fair symphonies but, having failed to be acclaimed as a great composer, took to writing cinema music and "popular" songs—some, like his popular *Song of Moscow*, of striking vulgarity. Khrennikov must have known, at the time of the Central Committee discussion, that he was the most likely candidate for the presidency of the Composers' Union "under new management". But the worst exhibition of cringing and self-flagellation was that of Muradeli—the Muradeli who, nominally, was at the root of all the trouble. He ate dirt with relish, and went out of his way to have all the leading composers take part of the blame, indeed most of the blame, for the failure of his opera. Shostakovich and others not unnaturally thought that Muradeli was himself primarily responsible for his failures.

Shostakovich's two statements cannot be taken at their face value. They are the words of a great artist, utterly bewildered by what was happening, and making all sorts of irrelevant remarks, regardless of the fact that a very large part of the whole discussion was directed against him personally, and against his music. His promise, at the end of his second statement, to be good, and his thanks to the Party for all its fatherly care, are part of a pathetic human document. They are the words of a man—still only just over forty—who feels himself crushed and beaten, but who sees no future for himself except in a world where he will henceforth be bossed by Zhdanovs and Zakharovs, and who still hopes against hope that somehow he, Shostakovich will find a place in it. Perhaps even plain personal, material considerations, combined with the feeling that (for better or for worse) he *belongs* to Soviet Russia, till the end of his days, account for that pathetically meek behaviour of Shostakovich in the midst of people, so many of whom are his enemies.

Miaskovsky's case is tragic in a different way. He had devoted all his life to the cause of musical culture in Russia; he wrote twenty-five symphonies, besides numerous other orchestral works and chamber music. All his music was of a high professional standard, and some of it remarkable—for example, his Sixth Symphony, his Twenty-fifth Symphony, some of his quartets, and his piano music. His works are often described as being "in the Tchaikovsky tradition", though some will find more obvious echoes of Brahms in them; but, less original, admittedly, than Shostakovitch or Prokofiev, he cannot fairly be classed as an imitative composer. He began to compose long before the Revolution—in 1907. To adapt himself to new Soviet conditions was a difficult and painful task, and some of his inner conflicts are reflected in his profoundly moving Sixth Symphony. But, in the end, this "old intellectual" adapted himself to new conditions, and took a deep joy in the thought that he, Miaskovsky, had succeeded in forming the bridge between the great era of pre-revolutionary Russian music—especially the Rimsky-Korsakov school—and the young generation of composers.

He never became very popular—perhaps for the simple, mechanical reason that he wrote too much, and was not performed nearly often enough. He would write a symphony each year; it would be performed, usually only once; polite notices would be published; then perhaps the Moscow radio would play it once or twice; and then—then Miaskovsky would write another symphony. He had, however, his small circle of friends who closely studied and loved his work; and no doubt he thought that in time he would become popular; there was nothing in most of his music that did not make easy acceptance by a large public possible. He was not ambitious, and sincerely admired his more loudly-praised younger rivals, Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Khachaturian; and at *premieres* of their works one invariably saw Miaskovsky in the audience, visibly happy to hear a fine new work by a Russian composer. He himself composed, as Rimsky-Korsakov used to compose, methodically, day after day—not in fits and starts.

There was something noble in the little man, whose neat grey beard and fine features, made him look like one of the more lov-

able characters of a Chekhov play. With diligence he composed, and composed, and seemed a happy man, untouched by envy. And then, all hell broke loose; wild accusations of "formalism" and "anti-People" tendencies were hurled against him, as against the others. He reacted differently from Shostakovich and Prokofiev; the coarseness and the injustice of it all made him sick and disgusted; he did not go to Zhdanov's meeting, and later, when the Decree was published, he was the bitterest man in the whole of Russia. He was sixty-eight; all his lifework was declared to be useless; he felt a broken man, and ignored all attempts to drag him into any further discussions. He ignored the summons addressed to him by the Composers' Congress in April, and the votes of censure passed on him meant nothing to him.

Whether Prokofiev was at the Zhdanov meeting, I don't know. Rumour in Moscow had it that he was there, and that he behaved truculently; but in the verbatim report there is no record of his having been present. Prokofiev later wrote to the Composers' Union; I shall quote his letter later.

One receives an insight into many other strange happenings from reading the verbatim report—happenings in newspaper offices where favourable criticisms of a musical work are turned, without the critic's knowledge, into unfavourable ones, and *vice versa* (see Gorodinsky's speech); happenings at the Composers' Union where the authority of a *Pravda* or *Culture and Life* article has the effect of paralysing all independent judgment, and where "open" discussion is often absolutely different from the lobby talk. The report also throws some light on the rôle of the Art Committee, and its unfortunate chief, Khrapchenko, who apparently did his best to encourage the Big Four, and now brought upon himself the wrath of the Central Committee. That sycophancy and cowardice, bordering on panic, were also common enough in that Moscow world of music is made particularly apparent by the courageous speech of the Director of the Moscow Conservatory, Shebalin—particularly when he tells of the panic caused at the Conservatory among some people at the thought that they might displease the Party authorities by playing some modern Soviet music—even at a "closed" concert!

A strange case is that of Professor Goldenweiser, a veteran of the Conservatory, and an old friend of Rachmaninov's and Scriabin's. His warning against lowering the professional standard of music was, no doubt, sound enough; but in view of his loud praise of Scriabin, one cannot explain his attack on Prokofiev and Shostakovich except by personal enmity, or a desire to keep in with the authorities. Unlike some others, he did not even have the courage to stand up for Miaskovsky. There were also a few pathetically-comic remarks, such as the complaint by Dzerjinsky, the composer of numerous rather indifferent operas, that "nobody wrote about him". But the greater part of the discussion really revolved round the strangely anti-Marxist demand made by Zhdanov himself that modern composers should, in effect, write "like Glinka and Tchaikovsky", and not be afraid of being "epigones"—which really amounts to saying that twentieth century Soviet music should speak the language of mid-nineteenth century Tsarist Russia! Another ever-recurring theme—and a very important one—to be found in the speeches of the "opposition"—was that, while they admitted certain errors and failures, and pleaded guilty to occasional "formalist" lapses, they were insistent that the work of the Big Four should not be dismissed *en bloc* as bad, and that a distinction should be made between their successful and their unsuccessful works. But the general tendency of Zhdanov was to condemn all their music as bad. And this, indeed, is suggested by the Decree, of which he undoubtedly was the author.

It is said that this conference with the musicians was a "democratic" discussion, since everybody was allowed to express his views. But the truth is that in the end, it was the Party (i.e. Zhdanov himself) who proclaimed to the country who was right and who was wrong. Zhdanov's figure dominates the whole debate. Not only did he open it; in effect, he also closed it, and some of his brief remarks and questions during the discussion are highly revealing. So also are the "cheers and laughter" with which some of his jokes—like the one about "atonalism"—were greeted.

Many at the conference behaved like schoolboys laughing at teacher's jokes.

The story of how the verbatim report was published is also strange. In the middle of March the papers announced that it would be published, and would, in a few days, be on sale. But when it came to the point, only very few copies were available. Full summaries of Zhdanov's speeches were published in the press, but little else. Was it because the "opposition", polite though they were, had still made out a very good case against the Party line? Was it feared that their arguments, if widely known, might weaken the effectiveness of the speeches made by the new pundits of the Composers' Union and by Zhdanov himself?

The report runs into 176 small pages, and is divided into the three days of the discussion. Some of it is of relatively little interest to the British reader—e.g. the speeches by operatic singers complaining of the insufficient attention given by modern composers to the vocal side—and there is also a good deal of repetition in the discussion. I therefore decided to select the most significant of the speeches, to condense some, and to omit a few altogether. Some speeches I have given *in extenso*, omitting nothing of any significance. These are the speeches by Zhdanov (I also give in full all his significant casual remarks and interruptions); by Muradeli, with his remarkable exhibition of self-abasement; by Zakharov, the triumphant lowbrow; by Khrennikov, the rising star under the new dispensation; by Khachaturian, one of the Big Four, Armenian and "folkish" to the core, but, at the same time, highly professional in his technique, and accused of "formalism" partly for this reason, and partly because of his rôle as Secretary General of the Composers' Union; by Shostakovich (two speeches); by Goldenweiser, to whom I have already referred; by V. Belyi, composer of some good songs and of a number of instrumental works of distinction; by Knipper, who (like Belyi) came out as one of the most outspoken exponents of the anti-Zhdanov school and had many interesting things to say on the strange *mœurs* prevailing at the Composers' Union; by Shebalin, Director of the Moscow Conservatory; and by Nestiev, head of the Moscow Radio Committee.

I have given in a more condensed form the speeches of Shaporin, one of the veterans of Russian music; of Dzerjinsky, the author of many not very successful operas; of Serebriakov, Director of

the Leningrad Conservatory; of Gorodinsky, music critic of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*; of K. K. Ivanov, the well-known conductor, who had much to say about the musical tastes of concert audiences in Russia; of Professor Kositsky, of the Kiev Conservatory; of Professor Keldysh, the critic and historian; of D. Kabalevsky, the well-known composer, and editor of the *Soviet Music* magazine; and of a few others. The three secretaries, other than Zhdanov, of the Central Committee—Suslov, Kuznetsov, and Popov—who were also present at the meeting, did not speak. At any rate, they are not mentioned in the verbatim report. To what extent, if at all, the report was expurgated, I do not know. But it still contains enough to be one of the most revealing documents of present-day Russia.

CONFERENCE OF MUSICIANS AT THE CENTRAL
COMMITTEE OF THE ALL-UNION COMMUNIST
PARTY: MOSCOW, JANUARY 1948

First Day

A. A. ZHDANOV (Introductory speech): Comrades, the Central Committee decided to ask you to come here for the following reason. Recently the C.C. attended a pre-view of Muradeli's new opera, *The Great Fellowship*. You realise how keenly interested we all were in this new Soviet opera, after an interval of more than ten years, in the course of which no new Soviet operas were produced. . . . Unfortunately our hopes were not fulfilled. The new opera did not prove a success. Why was that? . . .

First, as regards its music. It has not a single melody one can remember. The music does not "register" with the listener. The rather large and rather well-qualified audience of about 500 people did not react to a single passage in the opera. . . . What one found depressing was the lack of harmony, the inadequacy of the musical expression of the characters' emotions, the frequent cacophonous passages. . . . The orchestra is poorly used. Most of the time, only a few instruments are used, and then, at unexpected moments, the whole orchestra suddenly starts blaring. During lyrical moments the drums suddenly burst in, while the heroic moments are accompanied by sad, elegiac music. And, although the opera deals with the peoples of the Northern Caucasus, during an interesting period of their history, when the Soviet régime was being established there, the music is alien to the folk music of these peoples. . . .

[There follows some criticism of the vocal side—and of the libretto—with special reference to historical inaccuracies.]

We must try to assess the reasons for the failure of Muradeli's opera. If opera is the highest synthesis of musical art . . . then the failure of this opera is, after all these years, a great failure for Soviet music. It is not an isolated case, and we should like to establish the reasons for this failure.

The Art Committee and its leader, Comrade Khrapchenko, are chiefly responsible for this. He advertised Muradeli's opera all over

the place. Without having been seen and approved by authoritative public opinion, it was put on the stage in Leningrad, Riga, Sverdlovsk, and other cities. At the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow alone 600,000 roubles were spent on the production. . . . The fact that this is the second conference to be held by the C.C. in connection with Muradeli's opera—the first one was, chiefly, with the responsible leaders of the Bolshoi Theatre—shows how much importance we attach to this. . . .

I should like to recall some of the things Muradeli said during the first meeting. Muradeli claimed that he understood what the Party and the People expected from Soviet opera, that he also understood what melody meant, that he had a good knowledge of classical music, but that from his schooldays at the Conservatory he was taught not to respect the classical heritage. The students of the Conservatory were being constantly told, he said, that this heritage was out of date, that it was important to write new music, which was unlike classical music, and that it was important to be original and not to stick to "traditionalism". Also, that it was important to model oneself, not on the classics, but on the leading composers of to-day.

After he had graduated, he said, the same ideas continued to be drummed into him by our critics. . . . He also talked about the wrong education of our musical cadres, and about the way in which any opposition to modern canons was denounced as conservative and retrograde. . . .

Let us try to find out whether all this is true or not. . . . This is all the more important as the faults of Muradeli's opera are very like the mistakes which, in the past, marked Comrade Shostakovich's opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. I would not recall this, but for the great similarity of the two cases.

You will probably remember the article *Pravda* published in January, 1936, and called "Chaos instead of Music". This article was published on the instructions of the C.C. and expressed the C.C.'s view of Shostakovich's opera.

I shall recall a few passages from that article:

From the first moment, the listener is knocked over the head by an incoherent, chaotic stream of sounds. The fragments of melody, the germs of musical phrases, are drowned in a sea of bangs, rasping noises and squeals. It is difficult to follow such "music"; it is impossible to remember it. . . . And so it goes on, almost right through the opera. Screams take the place of singing. If, once in a while, the composer find his way on to a clear melodic path, he

immediately dashes aside into the jungle of musical chaos, which sometimes becomes pure cacophony. . . . Expressiveness . . . is replaced by a crazy rhythm. Musical noise is supposed to express passion.

All this is not because the composer lacks talent, or because he is incapable of expressing "strong and simple emotions" in musical terms. This music is just deliberately written "inside-out", so that nothing should remind the listener of classical opera . . . and simple, easily-accessible musical speech. . . . The danger of this "Leftism" in music comes from the same source as all "Leftist" ugliness in painting, poetry, education, and science. Petit-bourgeois "innovation" produces divorce from real art, from real literature. . . . The author of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* had to borrow from jazz its nervous, cramp-like fitful music, to give "passion" to his heroes. . . .

While there is all this talk of "Socialist realism", Shostakovich, in reality, produces nothing but the crudest naturalism. . . . It is crude, primitive and vulgar. . . . The music puffs and pants, groans and chokes, in order to present the love scenes in the most naturalistic way. . . . Such music can only appeal to esthetes and formalists who have lost all healthy tastes. . . .

That is what *Pravda* wrote twelve years ago. It is a long time ago; yet it is clear that the tendency that was then condemned is now alive, and not only alive, but setting the tone to Soviet music. The appearance of an opera of the same kind is a sign of atavism, and shows that what was condemned by the Party in 1936 is still going strong.

If the C.C. is wrong in defending realism and our classical heritage, then please say so openly. But let us not have any smuggling of anti-People formalism under the banner of devotion to our classics and loyalty to the ideas of Socialist realism. It is not quite honest. . . . It would be dangerous and disastrous if this renunciation of the heritage of the past, this degraded music, were to masquerade as Soviet music. We must call a spade a spade.

We do not know yet to what extent the well-known decisions of the C.C. on ideological questions have met with a response amongst our musicians, though we have been told of an alleged breaking of the ice in this direction. . . . Did you have any serious discussions on the subject? . . . We have serious doubts about it. Nor is it clear what form of government exists in the Composers' Union, and in its Organisational Committee. Is this form of government democratic, based on creative discussion, criticism, and self-criticism, or is it all more like

an oligarchy, where everything is run by a small group of composers, and their faithful retainers—I mean music critics of the boot-licking kind—and where everything is millions of miles away from real creative discussion, criticism, and self-criticism?

Allow me now to open this conference . . . and to request the comrades to state their views on the questions I have raised and on other questions which, though not touched upon in my introductory remarks, have a bearing on the development of Soviet musical art.

SHAPORIN (Composer): I have listened to Andrei Alexandrovich [Zhdanov] with deep emotion and attention, and heartily support his analysis, and those very sharp conclusions which he drew. . . . Although Soviet music has many indisputable achievements to its credit, indeed some great achievements, we cannot be satisfied with the result. We still owe the Soviet people much, because we have not yet reached that high ideological and artistic level the Party and Government require from us.

Andrei Alexandrovich asked us whether the Composers' Union had dealt with the C.C.'s ideological instructions of last year; and, if so, whether only formally. The answer is "Yes and No". We had a plenary meeting, where a long discussion took place; but if in literature and painting the question of æsthetics has been more or less clarified, in music we are still rather in the dark. Therefore, our plenary meeting really came to no conclusions on many questions of musical æsthetics. Andrei Alexandrovich stressed that the departure from tradition had a pernicious effect on new output. Yet a large part of our critics identify tradition with epigonism.

ZHDANOV: What do you musicians mean by that term?

SHAPORIN: Epigonism is the worst form of traditionalism. Tradition means the development of your predecessors' ideas.

ZHDANOV: I should like to get this straight. Who is branded an epigone? Is it those who learn from the classics?

SHAPORIN: Epigonism is not, in fact, a development of ideas but . . .

A VOICE: Blind imitation!

SHAPORIN: Yes. Opera is, of course, the most democratic musical form. And we are faced with the problem of creating a Soviet style of opera. In the last thirty years 300 operas have been written.

A VOICE: Six hundred.

SHAPORIN: Yet the number of operas that have established themselves is very small indeed. Many operas never got as far as the stage. The fault there lies with the theatres. . . . Tchaikovsky, however, suc-

ceeded only with *his* fifth opera—*Eugene Onegin*. Rimsky-Korsakov succeeded only with *his* third opera—*The Snow Maiden*. I consider that any opera of some artistic value should be put on the stage. Of course, the Bolshoi Theatre should put on only the best, those that have passed the test elsewhere.

Critics have been stressing that opera should not be composed of "complete numbers", but should be more in the nature of a succession of declamatory recitatives. In 1897, Rimsky-Korsakov was very worried about his gifts for writing melody running dry, and he concentrated on a "tuneful" opera, *The Tsar's Bride*, which holds the stage to this day. After the death of Rimsky-Korsakov, not a single Russian opera rose to the level of our classical operas.

Foreign influences, we must admit, were strong in this field. In Leningrad, in the 'twenties, no Soviet operas were played at all; as a rule, classical repertory was ignored; and what we got was Strauss's *Salome* and operas by Alban Berg, and other modernists. Shostakovich's *Nose* and *Lady Macbeth* suffer from their faults because for a long time our composers were enslaved by modernism. Also, to this day, Wagner's so-called "operatic reform" dominates the minds of many critics. Yet in Wagner everything is upside down—I mean, in "post-reform" Wagner; the orchestra takes the place of the singer and *vice versa*. As a result, our critics also had a bad influence on Muradeli—a man who can write melody, but whose unformed artistic consciousness was badly affected by these ideas that recitative is the right manner in opera.

[Shaporin then said that operas were composed "in secret", and that Muradeli would have done well to consult him (Shaporin), who would have pointed out his mistakes to him.]

As I listened to Andrei Alexandrovich's stern criticism, I felt bitterly that we should ourselves have discovered our errors, especially as the C.C. had given us clear indications on the subject over a year ago. At the same time I am infinitely moved by the attention given us by the Party and the Government, who once more have pointed out to us our errors and the ways of overcoming them.

MURADELI (Composer): Comrades, in the name of the Party and the Government, Andrei Alexandrovich rightly and sharply criticised my opera, *The Great Fellowship*. He first spoke about it some days ago. I thought it over very deeply. As a man, as a citizen, and as a Communist, I must say that I agree with what he said.

[Muradeli then went on to say that he attributed his failure to certain pernicious influences.]

In 1936, while I was a student in Moscow, a Russian colleague at a meeting said: "What I like about you young composers from the Caucasus and Central Asia is that you do not lose touch with the creative genius of your own people." In reply to this I said: "Thank you . . . but why is it that here, at the Moscow Conservatory, you don't teach young Russians to follow in the traditions of the Russian people and of the Russian classics? Why do young Russian composers follow in the footsteps of the West?" . . .

Why do we find the same tendencies still alive to-day, both in Moscow and Leningrad? All this is not due to accidental mistakes, but is directed by certain forces. . . . Who could maintain that in thirty years we have produced a single Soviet opera, accepted and beloved by the People? Or a symphonic work which has become a real favourite with the People? Some songs, it is true, have been picked up by the people, but not any of our major works.

[Muradeli then described his childhood at Gori, and his youth. His brother played the mandoline and he himself sang folk songs. Not till he was eighteen did he learn the elements of music—when he went to Tbilisi Conservatory. His "bad heritage" was created, not naturally, but by his environment since he took up music professionally.]

My First Symphony was well received both in Moscow and Leningrad. It was dedicated to the memory of Kirov, and was played at a Leningrad factory, where the workers liked it. But the critics thought it unoriginal and written in a poor musical language. To whom was I to listen? Naturally, I had to listen to the press.

[He then talked about "the kind of things that happen in our milieu", and described the case of the young composer, Weinberg, who had come to Russia from a Western country.]

We saw he was a gifted young man. But instead of saying to him "You have come to our Soviet country, and you must learn to reflect its life and its ideas", our critics went all crazy about him. They proclaimed him to be an outstanding composer, a star which would rise after Shaporin, Shostakovich, Miaskovsky, and so on.

Comrades, why are we ruining this young man? Is it not kow-towing to the West when we get excited about this music, and forget about the work done by our classics, and also by our own Soviet composers?

Once I also asked a comrade why, in Prague, they were playing Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony. I am sorry to put the question so brutally. . . .

ZHDANOV: That is what we have come here for.

MURADELI: I consider Shostakovich one of the most remarkable of modern composers—a man whom I love and respect, who is my friend, and whose friend I shall be for ever, if he does not become too offended by what I say to-day. . . . It was decided to stage an outstanding Soviet composer in Prague. It was quite right to send him there. But the Eighth Symphony had received very contradictory reviews in the Soviet press; it had not been awarded a Stalin Prize; the musical public were sharply divided; there was no unanimity as there is in the case of our best compositions. There was such unanimity in the case of the Fifth, but not in the case of the Eighth Symphony. Why did they not perform the Fifth instead? The reply I got from one comrade was: "But the Eighth is just the sort of music they like in the West."

So are we to export to the West the things that *they* like? Why should we not rather send to the West those works which clearly reflect our democratic Soviet features: Must we be guided by Western tastes? I consider that the policy of V.O.K.S. in distributing our musical works abroad should be re-examined. As a Soviet musician, I don't want our faults to be treated as achievements abroad. Let them "pan" our achievements if they like; it is our achievements which we ought to show them.

Comrades, to-day is a very important day in my life. . . . I must say that it hurts me very much to have made such a grave error. I worked sincerely; I wanted to do my best for the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Revolution, and I wanted to live so that I should not be ashamed on my deathbed. . . . I assure Andrei Alexandrovich, the C.C., and all my friends that I shall try to understand my mistakes, and shall try to do what the C.C. requires of us.

ZAKHAROV (Composer of Popular Songs): Comrades, it seems to me that this discussion has gone off the rails. I work in the field of Russian folk song. I am very frequently in contact with the People, in the real sense of the term. If I repeat the question already put by Andrei Alexandrovitch, whether things are well in the field of musical production, then I should reply: "They are not well at all." . . .

Muradeli's opera is not the main point. It is, in fact, one of the most intelligible works. But let us look at our symphonic music. Here

some big names have established themselves, both at home and abroad. But I must say that the works of these composers are alien and completely incomprehensible to our Soviet people. There are still discussions round the question whether Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony is good or bad. Such a discussion is nonsense. From the point of view of the People, the Eighth Symphony is not a musical work at all; it is a "composition" which has just nothing to do with musical art whatsoever. And it is not the only work of its kind; we have many more like it. And such works must not be held up as models of Soviet creative art.

Unfortunately, the atmosphere that exists, not only in the Composers' Union but in the musical world generally, is such that it would have been impossible for me to speak like this anywhere—either at the Composers' Union, or at the Conservatory, or in any musical organisation. . . .

The whole of our people are now busy carrying out the Five-Year-Plan. We read in the papers of heroic deeds in factories, on collective farms, and so on. Ask these people whether they really love Shostakovich's Eighth or Ninth Symphony, and a whole lot of other symphonic works—as the press claims they do. By the way, *Pravda* said nothing about the Eighth Symphony.

A VOICE: Nobody wrote about it.

ZAKHAROV: Oh yes, they did; not only did they write about it, but they praised it to the skies. If I speak harshly, it is because, in my opinion, our symphonic music has reached a dead end. Our "achievements" in this field are completely divorced from the People. . . . The argument used is that one must "lead" the People. That is true, but it has nothing to do with these musical works. In order to lead the People, one must speak to the People in a language they can understand.

Some of these composers argue that they are very successful abroad. Not only that; they imagine that they represent the true achievements of Soviet symphonic music. Let me say this: Shostakovich's Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Symphonies are supposed to be considered as works of genius abroad. But who considers them as such? Who . . . apart from the reactionaries against whom we fight, apart from the bandits and imperialists? Do you think the People in foreign countries like these works? I can say quite categorically: "No; impossible." To-day the most popular composer in the world is our Tchaikovsky. His music is used in many foreign films.

But I want to say something about the ideological side. Our com-

posers with great names fail in this completely. These composers have divorced themselves from the People and are of no value to the People. I do not imagine that Shostakovich is deliberately unwilling to serve the People; I would not make this charge against any of our composers. Nor would I say that they were deliberately writing unacceptable music. Still, what they write is not what our People want. . . .

The critics, in turn, have become "translators"; the "Chinese" language of the composers has to be translated into Russian. . . . Recently, one Russian writer said to me: "There is some Soviet music which one can only listen to under chloroform." I consider that certain things are totally intolerable. Thus, there was a big article in *Culture and Life* on the Party spirit in literature. Long, long ago, we should have raised this question in the case of music. It is not true that the Party Spirit does not apply to music. . . .

We have achievements in some other fields, notably in song-writing; though here too not all is well. Thus, Bogoslovsky's music for the film, *Great Life*, was condemned by the C.C. This condemnation may have had little effect, but still one can now call a spade a spade and call a petit-bourgeois song a petit-bourgeois song. But our symphonies have put up an iron curtain, indeed a steel curtain between the people and themselves.

A VOICE: You don't know what you are talking about.

ZAKHAROV: I know better than you do what I am talking about. They have done it, not accidentally, but quite consciously. Because to them the song is something "plebeian". To make use of a song in their work is degrading—so they think. I, on the other hand, think they ought to try to raise themselves to this higher level of the folk song. If only our composers would descend from Olympus and say to themselves: "What must I, as a composer, do at a time when the country is working on the Five-Year Plan?"—then things would be different. During the blockade in Leningrad, when people were dying of hunger in factories, they asked for folk songs to be played them on the gramophone, not Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony!

I apologise for speaking so sharply, but at no other composers' meeting has it been possible to say all this; it would have been treated as an "outrage" against musical culture. . . . I consider that if any of these composers really tried to write for the People, if his work were taken to a factory and played there, and if the workers welcomed it with real warmth, such a composer would have a feeling of immense creative satisfaction. And then there would never be any more formalism in his work, no more "art for art's sake"

KHRENNIKOV (Composer of light music): I believe my friend Muradeli is quite sincere when he says his opera was a failure because he wasn't taught properly; but, surely, such an explanation is infantile. When he received a Stalin prize for his Second Symphony, he did not complain of his teachers. . . . Even so, the musical atmosphere in which we live is not healthy.

The present crisis was expected by many of us. . . . When our central newspapers wrote about the flourishing state of Soviet music, they invariably illustrated this by mentioning four names—sometimes five; the fifth was added or not, according to circumstances. And many people realised that these four or five names were insufficient to describe the state of Soviet music. Soviet music is much richer, and much more varied than the work of these four or five men who were being boosted. I mean our song writers, whom our people like, and who are never boosted—Dunayevsky, Solovyov-Sedoi, and many others, whose music has penetrated far and wide among our people. These men never figure in the constellation of the big "Stars". . . .

The coming of the crisis was foreshadowed in a short article by Asafiev in *Soviet Art*, in which he said that our symphonists "had forgotten about the listener". Though a sick man, almost bedridden, Asafiev is a highly sensitive musical judge and he felt the growing alienation between our big symphonists and the People. The big four—or five—whose work was being boosted by the press and our concert organisations . . . found themselves in a sort of privileged position: they were immune against criticism, against the pressure of public opinion, as it were. They became musical top bureaucrats. Kowtowing critics described everything they wrote as a work of genius. Their faults were not mentioned, and young composers followed blindly in their footsteps, turning even their mistakes into part of the dogma.

Take, for example, Shostakovich's contribution to the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Revolution. . . . He wrote a sort of orchestral fantasia or potpourri made up of some of our popular songs, such as Dunayevsky's *Song of the Homeland*. In Shostakovich's version, this song sounded less good than in Dunayevsky's original. Yet there were some who immediately proclaimed Shostakovich's orchestral fantasia to be a work of genius. It seems to me that even Shostakovich himself was taken aback by this fulsome praise; he did not consider this work important—just a small job he had done for the occasion, since he had not had time to do anything else.

Our press often quite uncritically publishes any old thing American

critics say about our music, even when such "criticisms" are made purely for advertising purposes. Remember what they wrote about Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony: it was described as a work of stupendous genius besides which Beethoven was a mere pup. It turned our composers' heads, and our young composers fell blindly for all this hyperbole and adulation.

[Khrennikov then said that the box-office receipts at concerts of modern music were typical of the lack of interest on the part of the people. When recently Prokofiev's Sixth Symphony and Khachaturian's "Symphonic Poem" were first performed, he asked the director of the Conservatory hall whether there would be a repeat performance. The director said he doubted it: if they played these works for a second time, the hall might be half-empty.

Yet, on the following day, *Pravda* pompously announced that the concert had been a great success. In a way, it was, of course, a success. The public applauded, because the public love both Khachaturian and Prokofiev. But the way *Pravda* presented the news, suggesting that these two new works were events of the first magnitude, somehow cut the ground from under the critics' feet. . . .

There are strange manners at the Composers' Union. Let me take the case of Khachaturian's cello concerto. At the meeting held there, the *rapporteur* in the main praised the concerto, and then asked others to express their views. Nobody raised a voice of criticism. . . . In the lobbies dozens of people were running down Khachaturian's concerto, but no one dared openly say a word against it. . . .

Another example is the case of Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony. When *Culture and Life*, organ of the C.C., wrote a mild criticism of Shostakovich's work, what happened at the Composers' Union? Tsytovich, the critic, went off the deep end. How did *Culture and Life* dare speak so irrespectfully of a work of genius like Shostakovich's Ninth? This lack of criticism, of friendly, constructive criticism at the Composers' Union, where the "top bureaucrats" are concerned, creates a foul atmosphere.

ZHDANOV: Comrade Khrennikov, have you heard people express the view that it does not matter whether the People understand or don't understand such-and-such a composer, since in time they will?

KHRENNIKOV: Such talk is of old standing. It comes from self-complacency: such a theory makes life easier.

ZHDANOV: Then they consider that, if the People don't understand their music, it doesn't matter? So the People go their way, and the

composers go their way; and, like two parallel lines, "never the twain shall meet". Is that right?

KHRENNIKOV: Yes, I suppose so.

DZERJINSKY (Composer of operas): . . . I believe that some composers, in search of originality at any price, often don't like to listen to their own works. . . . The important thing is that a young composer's work should please, say, Prokofiev, or Shostakovich, or Miaskovsky. That means a capital investment. The composer begins to broadcast the fact that such-and-such a work of his has won the approval of such-and-such leading personalities. Whether the public (or even the composer himself) likes the work is quite unimportant. But if the Big Shots like it, it means the work will go before some committee, and then the question of prizes will arise, and so on. As for the People, in time they will "grow up" to appreciate it. . . .

As regards opera, many operas were written for the Thirtieth Anniversary. I wrote one: *Kniaz-Ozero* (Prince-Lake). It was put on by the Kirov Theatre in Leningrad. There were no critiques of this opera, only a few small notices. . . . There was no criticism, because critics always consider the question whether the composer is influential or not. If he is, then it does not pay to speak critically of him; if he is not, then one can well afford either to "pan" him, or to ignore him. I happen to be in such a position. Nobody writes anything about me, even though, since *Quiet Flows the Don*, I have written six more operas, all of which were produced—some successfully, others less so. The question of criticism must be carefully revised; just now too many critics are, if you will excuse my saying so, nothing but flunkeys in the service of the big composers.

KHACHATURIAN (Composer and Vice-Chairman of the Organisational Committee of Composers' Union) . . . I should like to say a few words about the Composers' Union. It seems to me that, despite our efforts, we have so far failed to create a real comradely atmosphere at the Union. Our discussions, though numerous, and on vital subjects . . . are of little practical consequence. . . .

Khrennikov has made some sharp criticisms. I liked his speech, and I agree with him, except on this point: when he said there was no honest and candid criticism in our midst, why did he not go in for it himself? Why did he, like the others, whisper in the lobbies instead? It is true that a sort of "general staff"—but with little contact with the troops—was formed. Our press, too, usually kept repeating the same

names, and did not stress the democratic tendencies of our music. We are proud of the fact that our music is so varied in its *genres*, and our press is wrong to speak of only some categories, and not others. Composers like Khrennikov, Shaporin, Dzerjinsky, and Solovyov-Sedoi, have been neglected by the press. . . .

I should like to answer the question you, Andrei Alexandrovich, put to Khrennikov. It is true that amongst some of us—I say some, not all—there is the pernicious idea that the artist marches ahead of his time and may not be appreciated by his contemporaries. Hence the attitude: “Well, never mind, they’ll appreciate me in future.” I must admit that these harmful, un-Soviet moods do exist among some of our composers.

ZHDANOV: Do you know how I should define that? I should call it extreme individualism when a composer decides that he himself is the highest and sole judge of his work.

KHACHATURIAN: Of course, such things are never said openly.

ZHDANOV: Are not such moods criticised?

KHACHATURIAN: Yes, but rather weakly and half-heartedly. . . . We often do not receive enough guidance. The radio has an enormous mail, praising or criticising this or that musical work. Why is this mail kept secret? . . . I don’t think Soviet composers deliberately go out of their way to write in a complicated manner; nor do I think they are under any strong Western influence. But we have a passion for technical virtuosity.

The composers of our middle generation, owing to the Revolution, started working in earnest rather late in life—at eighteen or twenty. There was a rush to acquire technical proficiency. I love folk songs, and have worked much on folk material, as you know—especially Armenian folk material. But, like others, I did not want to lag behind certain high technical ideals—mistaken though they may be. So I lost some control over my material.

I regret that Zakharov should have chucked all our symphony music into one bin. In the West, symphonism¹ ended with Mahler. Russian composers went their own way throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. . . . We are happy to think that among Soviet composers there are those who built a bridge between this classical Russian music and our music—notably a man like Miaskovsky. All the time we have been hearing that Soviet symphonic music holds the leading place in the world. Why then suddenly tell us that it has

¹ It is curious how the existence of Sibelius, and also of composers like Vaughan Williams and others, is completely ignored in all these discussions.

no achievements to its credit? We have many works which have been accepted by the musical world and by the People. In the heat of these discussions, it is right to criticise sharply; but why deny that we have some achievements, however modest, to our credit in the symphonic field?

Zakharov's statement greatly upset me. Perhaps I did not understand him. I always valued his statements in the past. I think it is wrong at a responsible moment like this to talk irresponsibly of important things. You can't lump the whole of Shostakovich together. One mustn't forget about the fine work he has done. Have I stopped understanding what this is all about: or has Shostakovich really contributed nothing to Soviet symphonic art? It is absolutely vital to differentiate between good and bad.

[He went on to say that the press dealt very inadequately with music, and gave composers no guidance; the only weekly concerned with music was "Soviet Art", and most of it was taken up with the other arts. The publishing houses were small and modest for a country with the S.U.'s enormous musical output and culture.]

There ought to be an experimental opera theatre, and closer contact between opera composers and the theatres; it is no good for an opera composer simply to turn up at the theatre and put his MS. on the director's table. A composer must also have some assurance that, if he writes a good opera, it will be produced. You can't decide, sitting at the piano, whether an opera is good or bad. Theatres are extremely slow in deciding on new productions. Hence our preference for symphonic music. Moreover there is a live symphonic tradition; in opera there is no such continuity. . . .

I did not prepare my speech, and I am very nervous, and did not say all I wished to say, but I should like to say just this in conclusion. I am happy that this criticism should take place at this moment, on the eve of the Composers' Congress. This Congress is a great event in our lives; it ought to review the work done in the last thirty years, and also decide on our future course. . . . I believe . . . we shall satisfy the Party and the Government with our work. . . .

SEREBRIAKOV (Director of Leningrad Conservatory): . . . We do not give enough attention to directing the creative work of our students. Further, our staff have not reached a high political and ideological level. Hence "art for art's sake" ideas, "music for music's sake" ideas are widespread. Our professors—men like Shostakovich,

Scherbachov, and Prokofiev—are men of great talent, and therefore have a particularly strong influence on our students. In the finals we often see nothing but little Prokofievs or little Shostakoviches. Hence, as Shaporin said, a certain uniformity among our students. And what they learn from their teachers is chiefly a certain complexity of musical language, which does not appeal to the People. . . .

I venture to suggest that Prokofiev's *War and Peace* is not an opera that can appeal to the People. It gives nothing to either head or heart. Yet I am a trained musician. Admirers of the opera tell me that, to appreciate it, I ought to hear it five times. For whom, then, has it been composed? For a narrow circle of connoisseurs? Or for the people? And yet, when such a work is awarded a Stalin Prize, people get puzzled. The same applies to the piano sonata for which Prokofiev also received a Stalin Prize. . . .

I do not agree with Zakharov about Shostakovich. One must distinguish between what is good and what is bad; otherwise what guidance are you to give him for the future?

I am a supporter of the "Russian heritage" school of thought. . . . But I am afraid of one thing: if, as we are told to-day, we ought not to write complicated harmonies, we shall start writing in thirds and diminished sevenths. I fear some of our minor composers might choose that easy way. Musical language must be intelligible to the people, but it must not become primitive. . . .

Our composers should turn their attention to the songs of the people. Glinka and Tchaikovsky did; and so did Mozart and Beethoven. . . . Some of our composers want to be "original" at any price. Whether their music appeals to the people, they don't much care. They sometimes say that Beethoven, too, was not fully appreciated during his lifetime. But, surely, one must remember that Beethoven lived in a different age. Some of our comrades already consider themselves great composers; that is arrogance, and nothing more. It is intended to justify some of their formalist stunts. . . .

SHOSTAKOVICH (Composer, and member of the Organisational Committee of Composers' Union): At this meeting many interesting ideas have been expressed; they will be fruitful in our reflections about the state of things in the world of music, which we all love. I cannot express my thoughts very well or in detail, but I should like to say just a few things. Shaporin said that, if Muradeli had gone to him for advice, the latter's opera would have been better. This remark caused some commotion here. . . . I don't suppose he meant this literally.

What I think he meant to say was that we lack a creative atmosphere; composers write their works in a cell, as it were, without consulting anyone. What we need is creative friendship and not just "palliness" and mutual admiration.

Our musical criticism has not a good record. I do not mean critics only, I also mean the composers themselves. The composer must also be a critic. We must criticise each other. The composer, as one of the leaders of the musical world, must not be offended when he is criticised; he should be offended when there is no criticism, because criticism helps him to progress, while lack of criticism does not help, but, on the contrary, acts as an impediment.

The composer must be much more critical towards his own work. And maybe, before publishing his work, or having it performed, he should think hard whether he has the right to do so, and whether he has really worked on it to the best of his ability. Also, there is too much specialisation; some write symphonies, others write chamber music only, or opera only, or songs only. It seems to me that the composer should strive not to limit himself to one *genre*. It is said that Dzerjinsky has not progressed since his *Quiet Don*. Is it not because he wrote six operas since then? Should he not try his hand at something else, and not concentrate on opera only?

Comrade Zakharov was not very thoughtful in what he said about Soviet symphonies. It seems to me that he was not right, because there are, in our symphonic music, many great achievements; though there are also faults and failures, which should be pointed out.

The C.C. has brought us together so as to see what kind of air we breathe, and what our ailments are; to listen and talk to us; and to find out what should be done to raise our musical movement to a higher level, so that there should be no unsuccessful works, and so that Soviet music should advance. The C.C. has often pointed out what the "negative" sides were in the field of art and criticism; and now, I suppose, instructions will be given. From to-day's conference, and from the coming Congress, we should derive many highly valuable decisions, so that our art should advance, and should be even better than it is now.

Second Day

A. GOLDENWEISER (Professor of Moscow Conservatory): In recent years I often expressed my disapproval of the road chosen by most Soviet composers, with the "Stars" at their head. Some treated me as a bit of an old duffer. . . . But I don't think I have lost my capacity of appreciating things that are genuinely new. Musical art was born from folk song and folk dance. . . .

Rachmaninov was in the great tradition. . . . In the West, the opposite process took place. After the death of the last two German geniuses, Brahms and Wagner, and of Berlioz, Franck, Gounod, Saint-Saens, Debussy and Ravel, and Verdi—one might add Puccini—music was completely taken over by the "modernists", those representatives of decaying capitalist society.

The laws of harmony are so flexible and natural that it is possible to produce, without violating them, simple things like Dargomyzhsky's songs and the spicy, pungent harmonies of Rimsky's *Golden Cockerel*. The Western modernists broke all these rules; now every combination of sounds became permissible. . . . I am infinitely devoted to Russian song, to Glinka and Tchaikovsky, yet I was among the first to play Skriabin, that man of genius. His last sonatas and *Prometheus* are harmonically bold, almost paradoxical. But no one would call them cacophonous—whether you like them or not.

To-day I am tired of false notes. The music of our contemporary composers, big and small, violates that harmony which is dictated by natural hearing. The feeling that discords must be resolved has been lost. When I hear the clatter of false chords in some of our new symphonies and sonatas, I am horrified to feel that they are akin to the decadent ideology of the West—or even of Fascism—and not to the healthy nature of Russian, Soviet humanity. Unfortunately, one gets used to anything; they say that in China people cook in castor oil. But we must get rid of this harmonic chaos and falseness.

Not so very long ago our music critics tried to represent Tchaikovsky as a ruined nobleman mourning over his lost wealth; and Rachmaninov, because he had gone abroad, was to be cut out of the list of Russian composers altogether. Our people rebelled against this attitude. Tchaikovsky became the Soviet listener's most beloved composer. Rachmaninov, after many years abroad, produced his profoundly Russian Third Symphony, a work of genius, very far from the influence of Western formalism.

No wonder the decaying bourgeoisie have no use for Rachmaninov,

except as a pianist. They are also indifferent to Tchaikovsky, as well as to Skriabin, whose marvellous piano works are never played by foreign pianists; and yet they accept as their own our present-day modernists. This is quite understandable, because these composers are very gifted people, and the West has nothing to offer in their place. . . .

Last time we talked a lot about the accessibility of music as far as mass audiences were concerned. Here there is a danger of throwing out the baby together with the bathwater. Complicated piano and orchestral music require "learning", even for a trained listener. One must not go to the other extreme, and forget that, if you play to a musically ignorant person a Beethoven or a Tchaikovsky symphony, it will not "register". A song will "register" at once, but the more complicated forms require a certain preparation. A completely untrained audience would detect little difference between Beethoven and a purely formalist work. We must not, however, go to the other extreme; while abandoning chaotic harmonies, we must not slide down to technical pauperism. Some of our composers, supporters of simple, popular music, easily accessible to the wide public—and among them there are some gifted people—unfortunately don't know enough about counterpoint, harmony, thematic development, form, instrumentation, and are, in fact, technically, often quite helpless. . . . We must be determined not to cater to cheap tastes.

GORODINSKY (Music critic of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*): . . . There are masses of people who fully understand complicated symphonies and the deepest thoughts of Tchaikovsky, Borodin, Rimsky, Mozart, and Beethoven. The fact that these people, who understand all this music, should yet not respond to much of our modern music, shows that there is something wrong, not with them, but with the music. . . .

In the 'twenties and right into the 'thirties, people preached expressionism with impunity. In the periodicals published by the Association for Contemporary Music, Sabaneyev, the critic, proclaimed that "music is not ideology". The R.A.P.M. (Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians) were not alone in talking about Tchaikovsky's decadence; in the "Contemporary" camp they also were saying: "Which comes nearer to the proletariat—Tchaikovsky's pessimism or the crisp excitement of Deshevov's *Rails*?" . . . In fact there was no music at all in these *Rails*. That was a time when Mosolov wrote songs to the text of *Izvestia* advertisements. That was called realism.

We have no programme music. In Shostakovich, there is only the first part of his Seventh Symphony which might be called programme music. . . . And yet all the six symphonies of Tchaikovsky are programme pieces. Programme, subject matter, clear dramatic significance—all these are in the Russian tradition. No proper programme music was written for the Thirtieth Anniversary; hence one reason for the failures.

The Composers' Union is a sort of monastery; we even have our Father Superior, that old and very fine composer, Glière. Yet it is not he but Khachaturian who runs the place. And nobody knows what happens on the Organisational Committee.

A VOICE: Even some of its members don't know. . . .

GORODINSKY: But the trouble does not concern the Composers' Union only. There is the Art Committee. I was wrong in liking Muradeli's opera at first; in fact, we nearly all approved of it. . . . But, to do him justice, Khrapchenko sharply criticised it. He criticised it very sharply indeed; I was there and heard him speak. Why then I ask you, was it produced, and at the Bolshoi Theatre? We were convinced, after hearing Khrapchenko, that it would not be produced. Yet it was. Why? Strange to say . . . there was a certain logic in this madness: the Art Committee is so used to ignoring criticism, that it decided to ignore even its own criticism. Khrapchenko now says that he was overwhelmed by the clamour of the musicians. . . . And so the opera was produced in twenty different towns. It happened through a kind of inertia.

The Composers' Union does not like criticism. No sooner had a critical article appeared in our magazine, than the editor was removed. He was Kabalevsky, a musician we all respect. Why did he have to be removed?

KABALEVSKY: I haven't been removed yet.

GORODINSKY: Well, you are not working there any longer. And, incidentally, I should like to call attention to the highly arbitrary way in which critical articles are treated by the newspapers. I am now extremely careful: I stay down at the printers' and wait for the paper to go to press; for I never can tell what might happen: the editor might well change an unfavourable review into a favourable one. Such manipulations in "sub-editing" are by no means unusual.

K. K. IVANOV (Moscow Conductor): Who is responsible for the artistic fate of some gifted men? There is often a fatal lack of encouragement. Khrennikov wrote two good symphonies, but he received

no encouragement from the critics, absorbed with their own bosses, and now he has come to rank as a "film composer". Mokrousov wrote *Chapayev*, an opera with many good qualities; it was put on in the most slap-dash way, taken off after a week. Since then, greatly discouraged, he has taken to writing popular songs. Yet it is precisely people like these who might be of service in carrying out the wishes of the Government and the Party. Others have gone farther, and have taken to drink, or yielded to other temptations. . . .

Soviet symphonic music has many admirable works to its credit, which have fully established themselves with the public—Khachaturian's piano concerto, violin concerto and Second Symphony; Prokofiev's Fifth; Shostakovich's Fifth; also Shebalin's *Moscow Cantata* and Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky*. But what public has accepted these works? Surely, an intellectual public who normally go to symphony concerts; the broader masses are frightened away by modern symphonic music.

What is to be done? Are all these works of which we are proud to be discarded? Are composers to write "light" symphonies from now on? Or is there not another way? Cannot these works be taken to a wider public? Why should not orchestras go on tours to industrial centres, and give concerts, complete with lectures and talks? This used to be done in Leningrad, but in Moscow it has not been done for years. Yet in the past such tours proved of great educative value. Also better organisation and advertising will fill the concert halls.

ZHDANOV: Ah, so it's true that they are empty?

IVANOV: Always full when they play Tchaikovsky or Beethoven; but with modern music—even when some of the best works are played, works given Stalin Prizes—they are sometimes half empty.

SHEBALIN (Composer, and Director of Moscow Conservatory.) May I begin my speech with a lyrical digression, or rather a dramatic howl? I cannot . . . miss this opportunity of speaking of some of the economic problems of the Moscow Conservatory. The building and the two concert halls are in very bad condition. The roof is leaking all the time. In the hostels, the students live like sardines in a tin. The Mossoviet has often helped us, and many thanks to it; but we need more and more help; and when we get as far as the Ministry of Finance, then we start battering our heads against a stone wall. There's a comrade there called Zubok, who is a real terror!

Of course, we have our weak points, but I think the Conservatory is a sufficiently healthy organism to be able to stand some criticism.

But there is criticism and criticism. There may be severe criticism based on facts: such is Party criticism. But there is also a different kind of criticism. In *Sorochintsy Fair* there is a character called Hivrya who says to Cherevik: "You are a rabbit, and your wife is a rabbit, and everything around you is rabbity." . . . What Comrade Zakharov said about Shostakovich belongs to the Hivrya method of criticism; and to tell Shostakovich that everything about him is "rabbity" is, to say the least, unreasonable. . . . You have to pick and choose.

[There followed a passage on the hitherto abortive attempts made by the Conservatory to create an Academic Choir, and a "vocal group", which would be a source of vocal talent, of which there was such a shortage in Russia. He then turned to the question of the education of young musicians.]

During the post-war years some special difficulties have emerged in the work of educating new composers' cadres. The number of students studying composition is still small, and secondary schools do not provide a sufficient number of new recruits. . . . Nor must one shut one's eyes to the very hard living conditions of our young composers. The working programme is much too heavy. Students are not given enough time for their home work. . . .

What are their tendencies and their forms of specialisation? In the last forty years since the death of Rimsky-Korsakov, our composers have concentrated chiefly on instrumental music. This is due to a variety of causes. Since Rimsky's death, opera somehow has retreated into the background. Skriabin and Glazunov wrote no operas; nor, except at the beginning, did Taneyev and Rachmaninov. The demand that, in their final exams., composers should produce operas or scenes from operas was not revived until 1945; and, even then, this demand was theoretical rather than practical. . . .

Since the 'twenties, there had been much interest in Western formalism, and it took a long time to eradicate these tendencies. . . . And now, I ask you: Where is a young composer to find a libretto? Established composers find it hard enough to get a libretto; where is a student to get one?

I must admit that, although we had many discussions on the C.C. Decree on literary and art questions, we have so far failed to change some of our young composers' direction. Not all our students and professors have realised the necessity of reorganising their work in the light of the C.C.'s decisions; and, as the Director of the Conservatory, I must admit that we have not done enough in that direction. Nevertheless, the appearance in Prague, at the Youth Festival, of our

young composers showed that, despite all the sins we had committed in their education, their work remains essentially different from that of young Western composers. It is no accident that our people took all the first places at the Prague Festival.

As for the Organisational Committee of the Composers' Union, it reminds me of the Boyars' Duma in *Boris Godunov*. . . . We have a composer, Zverev, who is completely deaf as a result of sclerosis; the other day I received a letter from him. It is a pathetic human document, a cry of agony. He is being treated with complete indifference by the Union, partly because he *is* in such an unhappy and helpless position. Our Organisational Committee is the sort of machine which will do nothing until there is some strong outside interference. And Zverev is not the only one. The machine requires thorough democratization.

But, to return to music proper, it is wrong to say that all our composers write nothing but cacophony.

GOLDENWEISER: I didn't say "all"; I said "most".

SHEBALIN: If you say "most", or "the majority", or even "many", you are wrong, too.

GOLDENWEISER: I think I am right.

SHEBALIN: I doubt it. . . . Anyway, symphonism in the West is dead. The last great Western symphonist was Mahler. It is all the more important that our Soviet symphonies should continue the great Russian tradition of symphonic music. It is also flourishing to-day in Georgia, Uzbekistan, and other places where one would not have expected much a few years ago. Yet Zakharov makes sweeping statements and wants to throw everything overboard. This "all is rabbit" criticism gets us nowhere.

As for Russian folk songs, one would think, listening to Comrade Zakharov, that he was the only person who understood what it was all about. Maybe Comrade Zakharov claims papal infallibility in this matter. Plenty of composers are familiar with the whole question, and Zakharov's approach is absurdly narrow. It has often been pointed out that his own folk-songs are much poorer and less expressive than real folk songs, and that some of his songs are simply bogus folk-songs. . . .

[He then dwelt on the question of musical publications, saying that not nearly enough paper had been given to the musical publishing houses: the progress in the publication of the academic editions of Tchaikovsky and Rimsky Korsakov was "catastrophically slow": and it was a scandal that no critical standard edition of Glinka's works had yet been published in Russia.]

Before dealing with opera, I should like to say this. In connection with recent events, such as the discussion around Muradeli's opera, a certain feeling of panic has been aroused, and this panic may lead, here and there, to highly undesirable results. In the theatres, all Soviet operas are being scrapped, and it is already said that certain names, which might be considered "seditious", are to be removed from the MUSGIZ (State publishers) Catalogue.

This morning something quite ludicrous happened. A certain professor of the Conservatory phoned me and said: "Vissarion Yakovlevich, may we, at a closed performance in the Small Hall, play Soviet works?"

ZHDANOV: Panic is a poor counsellor.

SHEBALIN: That is why I thought it necessary to mention this. There are some servile idiots—if you'll excuse my saying so—who might cause a lot of trouble.

Now, as regards opera, Shostakovich here said that composers should strive to write in all *genres*. It is desirable; and yet we know from experience that even many geniuses did not feel like writing operas—Chopin, Liszt, Brahms, Skriabin, Glazunov, and many others. Schubert, Schumann, Beethoven were not at their best when they tried their hand at opera. Others, on the other hand, had a special liking for opera—Wagner, Verdi, Glinka, etc.

For my own part, I composed an opera before the war, right down to the last bar of the piano score. It met with complete disregard at the theatres, the Composers' Union, and everywhere else. . . . Now I can't be bothered with the thing any more. Many others have had the same experience. . . .

The Composers' Union must organise the production of libretti in a systematic way; it must become one of its main tasks in the next few years. Otherwise the whole problem of producing operas will be sabotaged from the start.

KOSITSKY (Professor of Kiev Conservatory): . . . In connection with the idea of composing an Ukrainian anthem, the Ukrainian composers were received by Kaganovich, who was then Secretary of the Ukrainian C.P. In the course of the discussion, it was said that the "Kuchka"—Rimsky, Balakirev, Mussorgsky, Borodin, and Cui—had very hard-and-fast ideas of what their aims were, as they had Stasov as their ideologist. We said the "Kuchka" were lucky to have such a fine ideologist. Kaganovich replied: "You Soviet composers are in a much luckier position than the 'Kuchka'. They merely had Stasov as

their ideologist, but you have the whole Party as yours. You are working in exceptionally favourable conditions."

At Kiev Conservatory, political education is well organised. In the circles where the Party and Komsomol organisations are formed, much is told to the young people about the international situation, and so on. But no one goes out of his way to tell them that the future of musical culture is in their hands, that they must be proud of having this great responsibility. Dogma is presented coldly to them, without imagination and passion. Thus, the political and ideological education of our students is carried out in a cold, uninspiring, unimaginative way, with little effect on their creative work. . . .

Shostakovich is recognised by all as a great and bright talent; but there are some things that worry us. Why are his Second, Third, Fourth and Eighth Symphonies never played, or his operas? As for the Seventh, I remember the enormous social and political response with which it met in 1942. We and our friends abroad all felt that it expressed the great spiritual might of the Soviet people. But, now that the war is over, we observe a certain revaluation of this work.

It is, indeed, true that in the Ukraine, we usually play only its first movement. But even about this first part I should like to say that, while the Nazi war machine is reflected with the utmost power of expression, the Soviet people, who later smashed this machine, are not portrayed with the same power of conviction. I know how deeply patriotic Shostakovich is, but I feel that, even in writing the first movement of the symphony, he did not think out his conception sufficiently clearly. He did not express sufficiently clearly the vision of our coming victory. . . . We should be happy if he told us something of his view of the future, of his future work. . . .

I should like to make a complaint to you, Comrade Zhdanov. Our press is in the habit of speaking of "Soviet music" on the one hand, and of "Ukrainian" or "Georgian" music on the other—the implication being that all that is best belongs to Soviet music, and the rest is something much less important. There ought to be some ruling on this terminology.

V. A. BELYI (Composer, and one of the members of the Organisational Committee of the Composers' Union): Among Soviet composers there are strong individualist moods, and these are the basis for formalist influences. To admit this is not to deny the achievements of Soviet music, especially in the field of symphony; many good realist works have been composed. But realism is not yet firmly established, and

formalist influences continue to hold their own, and to hamper the development of Soviet music.

Our whole middle generation studied during those years when Western modernism was in great vogue. All sorts of "isms", notably German expressionism, had a strong influence, and were well represented in the concert programmes of Moscow and Leningrad. The theory of revolutionary art, upsetting all the canons of bourgeois civilisation and establishing new forms of musical expression with unheard-of combinations of sound, was potent then, and has not lost all effect even now. . . .

Modernism certainly did much to destroy the canons of classical music—its melody, tonality and form. . . . In the course of its development, Soviet music started gradually overcoming the extremes of modernism. . . . But, in this constant conflict between realism and modernism, the progress of many of our composers has been extremely uneven.

After the famous *Pravda* article on *Lady Macbeth*, Shostakovich wrote his Fifth Symphony, with its pages of genuine humanity warmed by great emotional feeling. Though the Seventh (Leningrad) Symphony is uneven, it played a great part during the war, and was accepted by wide circles of public opinion as a symbol of our people's struggle against Fascism. Not everything in this work was convincing or intelligible. But our public, aware of the sincere and profound patriotic aspirations of the composer, and dwelling on what was best in the symphony, and neglecting its weaker sides, or rather forgiving them temporarily, accepted the symphony.

The Eighth Symphony was ignored by the press. But it was clear that this symphony had created both an overwhelming, and a repulsive impression: Shostakovich had fallen a victim to his ultra-individualist conception of life. The tragic experiences and sufferings that Hitlerism had caused mankind had captured Shostakovich's consciousness in an extraordinary degree. The urge to express these one-sided tragic experiences in the most powerful terms led him to use an extremely naturalistic language. The naturalism of this music, expressing terrible visions, creates a fearful, almost catastrophic impression. But the whole conception is one-sided, and dwells far too much on the dark and fearful sides of reality.

One has the impression that the composer is acutely scared, and that what he lacks is that great feeling of the Soviet people's optimism, a feeling that helps it to conquer all the dark forces.

Naturalism, no matter how elaborately expressed, is in fact part of a

primitive perception. This primitive psychology found expression in the Ninth Symphony, which should have produced so many happier and more optimistic visions and images. But the automatism, the grotesque (especially in the first movement) and a certain frivolity had little in common with the moods of Soviet people. This was all the more regrettable as the second movement of the symphony is attractive in its sincere and heart-felt lyricism.

Shostakovich should fight against formalism and its reverse side, naturalism. They have a strong effect on his melodious texture, and hamper the progress of his talent, from which our people expect so much.

The work of Prokofiev is also full of contradictions. He started out as a rebel against the tendencies of mystical, drawing-room modernism. Hence his sharp rhythms, his barbarisms. He has a melodic gift which is in the best Russian traditions of Mussorgsky and Liadov. Yet he wants to "innovate" at any price, and his rebellious spirit often makes him, as Mayakovsky would say, "step on the throat of his own song". Yet . . . the realistic elements of his art are in the great tradition of Russian music.

He still believes in "innovation for innovation's sake", he has an artistic snobbishness, a false fear of being commonplace and ordinary. It is curious to observe the struggle of the two Prokofievs in a work like his Sixth Symphony. Here the melodious, harmonious Prokofiev is often attacked, without provocation, by the other, storming, Prokofiev. The same is true in his operas, where little islands of exquisite lyrical music are lost in a sea of rough recitatives. . . . I have concentrated on these two composers, because they are men of great talent and their influence on young musicians is particularly great—though, I regret to say, the young copy their weak rather than their strong points. . . .

The direction of the Conservatory recently decided on a number of measures which made the composition of vocal music compulsory for the final examination. The students, however, continue to consider this as an irritating sideline, and continue to concentrate on instrumental music. It was not always so. When Miaskovsky was actively engaged in teaching at the Conservatory—in recent years he had given this up—there was much more concentration on vocal composition. Miaskovsky is in the great tradition of Russian music, and has directly maintained this tradition; he gave vocal music much attention. . . .

L. K. KNIPPER (Composer): Comrade Zakharov yesterday said that

there was no Soviet music, apart from a few songs. His passionate harangue was like a stroke of the pen, with which he crossed out the work of many men who have been writing Soviet symphonies in the last thirty years. It was all too simple. It is not true that we have no gifted composers. It is not true that they do not wish to serve the people. It is not true that nothing is being done in this direction. Comrade Zakharov is too busy on the song front to follow the work of the symphonists. He is not alone in this; composers are seldom interested in the work of their fellow-composers.

We are asked to democratise music, and to write more simply and intelligibly. Simplicity is the art of expressing the most complex idea in a precise, intelligible and beautiful form. The Soviet people is multitudinous and speaks in more than a hundred languages. The musical language of our peoples differs. Alongside Russian music, there is the four-voice music of the Ukrainians, the seventeen-note scale of Azerbaijan, the five-note scale of the Tartars and the Buriat-Mongols. There are cross-currents and mutual influences. . . . This interpenetration must take time, though. . . .

Music, like literature, has many *genres*. . . . Each *genre* has its technical peculiarities; you can't start standardising everything. Some here like songs, others quartets, others symphonies. Some like gay songs, others like sad songs. Some like the serene music of Rimsky's *Snow Maiden*, others prefer the harmoniously-complex later works like *Kaschei* or the *Golden Cockerel*. One cannot throw the late Skriabin out of Russian music. He is complicated, yet his *Poème de l'Extase* fills the concert hall.

Democratic musical language is not such a simple matter. In these last thirty years our literary language also has greatly changed. Our People has changed, so has its mentality. New conceptions require new words. It would have been ridiculous to demand from Mayakovsky that he write in the language of Nekrassov, or of Sholokhov that he write in the style of Karamzin. Musical language, like literary language, develops. We cannot speak to-day in the language of Borodin or Tchaikovsky.

Let us, by all means, develop what they achieved, but we must not simply start imitating them and repeating what they already said. Everything is movement. Inside the work of a single composer, there is change. The Tchaikovsky of the First Symphony is a different man from the Tchaikovsky of the Sixth. What he would have written after the *Nutcracker*—perhaps his most complex work—we don't know.

What, then, is wrong with us, Soviet composers? I don't think we

have enough contact with the People; we are much too confined to our studies, to our own narrow circle. We ought to study the type of the New Man, the Communist. . . .

Khachaturian said that we had a collegiate form of government at the Composers' Union. I should like to say that, in fact, we have no direction, and only pretend to be frightfully active.

We have our Composers' Union. It should be directed by the best composers of the country, and by the most promising younger men. This group should be the General Staff concerned with the ideological leadership among musicians. This direction, whose decisions would be compulsory for all, should also be in close contact with the C.C. and the Art Committee, and all decisions concerning cadres, the education of the young, propaganda, i.e. concerts (The Philharmonic), the press (MUSGIZ), and, above all, the radio, and V.O.K.S., should all be firmly co-ordinated.

But what happens in actual practice? There is the Organisational Committee of the Composers' Union, which, indeed, includes some of our best composers, but no young people. Occasionally they meet, often without a quorum. The presidium proposes some decisions. It is customary either to be politely silent, or to raise objections, but very tactfully and apologetically, and avoiding or wrapping up the truth. There are no sharp discussions of principles or anything else. All must be nice and quiet.

I'll give you an example. Recently Khachaturian wrote his *Symphony-Poem*, a poor work which, in the lobbies, everybody panned. A few days later, it was proposed that it be presented for the Stalin Prize. Eleven voted, and seven voted in favour. Now I positively know that out of the seven who voted *for*, at least four were abusing the work in the lobbies the day before. . . . Were they afraid of offending Khachaturian, or what? No, there is no democracy and there are no creative discussions in the Composers' Union. The discussions are about unimportant works, and there is an all-round desire not to have any rows or trouble. And since, during the war, the Composers' Union also helped composers and music critics materially, there is also a certain fear of losing certain material advantages.

The Union is a place for lobbying, for intrigues and gossip; it is not a creative organisation where people are determined to do a great solid, united job.

In all organisations that have anything to do with music, the leading persons are either members of the Composers' Union or even members of the Organisational Committee. This is very nice, but in reality, the

decisions of the Composers' Union are of no importance to its members holding these posts. . . . A person saying something at the Composers' Union one day, next day says something diametrically opposite, in accordance with the situation, or (I am sorry to be so frank) in virtue of some personal considerations. He may be afraid that some work of his may not be included in a concert programme, or something like that. In the direction of the Composers' Union there is no unity of purpose. The decisions taken are not binding for those present at the meeting. Therefore the Union's decisions carry no weight at the Art Committee and other organisations; they are used to seeing people come up the back stair or phone and say something quite different from what they had publicly stated an hour earlier.

Another characteristic among our leaders is the practice of double insurance—the practice of supporting two conflicting causes. First they give a member of the Art Committee some advice, but when it comes to supporting him openly, they back out.

I shall not speak of the Conservatory. But our secondary musical schools are much too few, and the results they produce are lamentable. Outside the main cities you will find no orchestras, no nucleus of musicians which it is so important to have. Instead of an orchestra, many towns have a wretched little band, which plays awfully badly.

Our vocal culture is in a very bad state. At the Bolshoi Theatre I have heard singers with famous names sing outrageously. . . . When this sort of thing happens at the Bolshoi Theatre, you can imagine what happens in so many other places.

The question of conductors is very serious. In the provinces, orchestras are conducted by completely incompetent people; yet we have gifted young graduates, who can't get a job as conductor. . . . Also, the operatic producer often knows mighty little about music, and starts messing about with the score, chopping and changing. If the timid young composer is not firm, the results can be disastrous.

Another point concerning orchestras. Hardly any musical instruments are made in Russia, and what is made is outrageously bad. In the provinces there are no harps. A harp costs 80,000 roubles; what provincial theatre can afford to pay such a price? Very few wood instruments (oboes, flutes) are made, and there are not enough strings. The production of musical instruments in our country must be properly organised.

SHEBALIN: There aren't enough instruments for teaching the students.

KNIPPER: Quite true. The Symphony Orchestra of the U.S.S.R. in Moscow should be the best orchestra in the country; yet, although it includes the best musicians, it is not the best orchestra. They are over-worked and under-paid. . . . The wood-wind players are so tired that they can't blow properly. We ought to have a symphony orchestra of the same kind, and as well endowed, as that of the Bolshoi Theatre. When we write our scores, we make allowances for the fact that the orchestra will play badly. It does not matter so much in the case of Shebalin, Prokofiev, or myself; but when a young composer is played, you no longer know what is bad composition, and what is simply bad playing.

. . . It is important to pay some attention to the literature on music we send abroad through V.O.K.S. and Sovinformbureau. Many people abroad are interested in our music and culture, but I am not at all sure whether the people who do the writing haven't their own axe to grind, whether they don't go out of their way to boost their pet composer, and give a distorted view of things.

P. A. MARKOV (Director of the Stanislavsky Theatre): Since its foundation our theatre has produced about twenty Soviet operas. . . . Yet I must say that the appearance of a Soviet opera is met by the public with distrust. Both in Moscow and in the provinces the majority of people prefer classical opera. Moreover, with modern subjects, listeners are less willing to accept the conventions of opera than with imaginary or historic subjects. Present-day characters singing on the stage strike many listeners as funny and absurd.

[SOLOVYOV-SEDOI (Popular song writer) spoke next. *Soviet operetta, he said, was largely modelled on frivolous Viennese operettas, e.g., "The Eleven Unknown" concerning the adventures of the Soviet football team in England. No operetta had yet been written which reflected the live intonations of Soviet reality.*]

Prof. KELDysh (Critic and Historian): The international rôle of Soviet music is very great. Comrade Zakharov is totally wrong when he says that the larger works of Soviet composers are admired by capitalist gangsters. Such a statement points to Zakharov's complete ignorance. In Western Europe and in America there are heated discussions round many Soviet works. It is the reactionary press that has been showering abuse on them. Our Soviet music has a great success in the West and in the East—above all among our friends, the democratic intelligentsia and the working class. In Czechoslovakia,

the works of our composers meet with the warmest approval from the workers. Soviet music is indeed a model and an inspiration to all that is democratic and progressive in the musical world of other countries.

But something more than that is required from the art of our time. Our art must express the Communist ideology, and must not borrow anything even from what is best in foreign countries. The point is that to-day even the most advanced artists of the capitalist countries are in a state of confusion, and the only way out of this confusion is Communism. Only if we are fully conscious of this fact can we produce works worthy of our time. . . .

Some of our music is still "neuropathic", with an excessive stress on gloomy thoughts. There is also a desire to "startle" with spicy and "scratchy" harmonies. Further, the neo-classical tendencies we find in some of our composers are derived from the West, and are a form of escapism. We cannot express Soviet reality and the feelings of Soviet Man in terms of Bach-like stylisations. . . . The idealist outlook underlying such music is alien to us. . . . Soviet music must, first and foremost, base itself on folk-song. . . . Only the question is not so simple as that. Having got rid of formalism and modernism, what are we to do next? Try to write like Tchaikovsky or Borodin?

A VOICE: That wouldn't be so bad.

KELDYSH: But that wouldn't quite solve the problem. How are we to avoid epigonism, while still following in the classical Russian tradition? In this a deeper Communist outlook would help. . . . Thus, Shebalin's cantata, *Moscow* suggests a traditional Moscow, it does not suggest Soviet Moscow, the capital of our country. . . . Our reality is majestic and heroic, and the Soviet people have composed many new heroic songs. . . .

The Composers' Union had a long discussion about Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony. That was a few months before the critical article appeared in *Culture and Life*. During the discussion many sharp criticisms were made, and it was proposed to publish a report of the discussion in *Soviet Music*. It was never published. It was said that it had been stopped from appearing by Khrapchenko, head of the Art Committee.

KHRAPCHENKO: It isn't true.

KELDYSH: Anyway, the Art Committee did nothing to encourage vital criticism, but rather hampered it. . . .

Third Day

D. KABALEVSKY (Composer, and editor of *Soviet Music*): Despite shortcomings, we have been moving in the right direction . . . towards a more popular, more accessible, more democratic style. Compare, for instance, Prokofiev's early works like the *Scythian Suite* with his *Romeo* or *Alexander Nevsky*! However, we must admit that our fully successful works are still the exception rather than the rule. . . . The mysticism, the fantastic in Russian art during what Gorki called our "shameful years" of 1905-17 had a deep effect on many of our composers. Hence the cult of form and high technique. . . . From the start, our composers endeavoured to bring Soviet themes into music. But they used modernist media of expression, and the hundreds of operas, symphonies, and other works they wrote remained sterile. These harmful influences and theories exist to this day. Many of our composers have progressed in zig-zags. I mean that, intuitively, they have striven to approach new democratic standards, but have, rationally, continued to delight in sophistication. In our discussions, we often noted the evil rôle of Western influence, including neo-classicism, notably in the work of Shostakovich, but we left it at that, and never raised our discussions to the level of a discussion on a great social problem. . . .

It must be said that the Organisational Committee of the Composers' Union has much to be blamed for. Khrennikov complained that nobody had openly criticised Khachaturian's cello concerto at our meeting there. But there is an explanation for this: a few days after the first performance of the concerto *Culture and Life* (an organ of the C.C.) published an overwhelmingly enthusiastic review. We do not consider such articles in *Culture and Life* to be mere "discussion articles", but are apt to regard them as the last word of the Party. Therefore, our subsequent discussions at the Composers' Union about the concerto fell flat.

Generally, our periodicals lack courage and initiative, I am sure that, but for the present meeting, none of them would have breathed a word against Muradeli's opera, after it had been approved by the Government's Art Committee. We like a quiet life. If, therefore, a paper like *Culture and Life* or *Pravda* or *Izvestia* has passed judgment on a new work, we like to leave it at that, and not argue.

ZHDANOV: Comrades, allow me first of all to make a few remarks on the character of our discussion. The general conclusion was that the state of affairs was not up to much. Some complained of organisa-

tional flaws, of the lack of criticism and self-criticism; others added their dissatisfaction with the ideological tendencies of Soviet music. Finally, some tried to tone down the acuteness of the situation, and to pass over in silence some of the more unpleasant questions. . . . But, on the whole, the general conclusion was that things were not too good.

I don't want to bring any dissonance or "atonalism" into this conclusion—even though atonalism is fashionable nowadays. (*Laughter.*) Things are really bad. It seems to me that the position is worse than was made out here. I am not denying that Soviet music has achievements to its credit. But if we think of what we might have, and what we actually have, or if we compare this with what we have in other ideological fields, then the achievements must be called very insignificant.

Take literature; our monthly magazines have so many new works in their files which are fit to be published, that it is becoming quite a problem. There is also progress in the cinema and the theatre. But music is lagging behind. There is an abnormal state of affairs at the Composers' Union and on the Art Committee. The latter was not sufficiently criticised here. Yet this Committee has played a most unenviable part. Posing as a champion of realism in music it was, in fact, exalting the formalists. Being, moreover, ignorant and incompetent, the Committee allowed itself to be led on by the formalists. The fate of Russian music was in the hands of a "monastery"—a closed circle of composers, and of a bunch of toadying critics. . . .

But the organisational question is not the main thing, though it is important. The fundamental question is the *direction* of Soviet music. This question got rather blurred in the course of the present discussion. We must get this question of *direction* straight. Are there two different directions in music? That at least became clear from this discussion, even though some comrades tended to play on muted strings, as it were. Yet it is clear that there is a striving to replace one direction by another direction. . . .

True, some comrades argued that there was really no need to make a fuss; there had been no qualitative departure from the traditions of Russian classical music, and what we were seeing now was merely a further development of that classical heritage—in Soviet conditions. . . . They preferred to talk about certain excesses of "technicism", occasional lapses into naturalism, etc. All this is camouflage.

It is not a question of occasional lapses, nor a question of the leaking roof of the Conservatory. This can be easily repaired. But there is a great big hole in the very foundations of Soviet music. The

truth of the matter is that the leading part in the creative work of the Composers' Union is played by Comrades Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Miaskovsky, Khachaturian, Popov, Kabalevsky, Shebalin. Any more names that you would suggest?

A VOICE: Shaparin.

ZHDANOV: Let us consider these comrades as the principal figures of the formalist school. This school is radically wrong.

The comrades I have named have also complained that there was no proper atmosphere of criticism at the Composers' Union, that they were praised too much, that they hadn't enough contact with the other composers and with musical audiences. But, surely, they might have said so, without waiting for the performance of a not altogether successful opera. The truth of the matter is that they did not mind the past state of affairs. (*Cheers.*) . . . The time has come when a radical change must take place. Insofar as any sharp criticism of these would, as Comrade Zakharov said, have led to an explosion, it is apparent that the intolerable hothouse atmosphere . . . was, in fact, created by themselves, even though they now claim not to have liked it.

I do not think, however, that they clung to these posts simply for the fun of it, like Vladimir Galitzky, in *Prince Igor*, who wanted "to be prince for a bit". (*Laughter.*) Was not this domination exercised in order to give Soviet music a certain direction? . . . One couldn't accuse say, Comrade Shostakovich of mere administrative ambition.

There is a struggle going on, though an outwardly hidden struggle, between two schools. One stands for the healthy and progressive things in Soviet music, for the full recognition of the importance of our classical heritage, particularly of the Russian classical school; it stands for a high ideological level, truthfulness and realism, and a deep organic connection with the People and its folk songs—the whole combined with a high degree of craftsmanship. The other school stands for formalism, which is alien to Soviet art, a renunciation of classical traditions. It is anti-People, and prefers to cater for the individualistic experiences of a clique of aesthetes.

Here the beautiful, natural, human intonations of music are replaced by false, vulgar, and sometimes pathological music. Yet the revisionist activities of this school are camouflaged; for these people continue to pay lip service to Socialist realism. Such "smuggling" tactics are not new, of course. . . .

Yet any listeners will realise the vast difference between classical Russian music and the false, ugly, idealistic music of the formalists. . . .

Some Soviet composers also have a theory that they will be appre-

ciated in fifty or a hundred years. That is a terrible attitude. It means a complete divorce from the People.

If I am a writer, painter, or Party worker and do not expect my contemporaries to understand me, then what am I living for? It leads to an emptiness of the soul. Yet such "consolations" are now being whispered to the composers by some critics of the boot-licking variety. . . . Think how different this attitude is from Glinka's or Mussorgsky's. . . . They also loved folk themes. Think of Glinka *Kamarinskaya* or Musorgsky's *Gopak*. One must conclude that landowner Glinka, government official Serov, and nobleman Stasov were more democratically minded than you. . . .

Stasov advocated the close study of Western classical music, but was against any slavish kow-towing to the West. . . . But in modern Western music there is really nothing whatsoever worth imitating. It is in a state of decay. . . .

It is not true that the "over-emphasis" on the national features of Soviet music would detract from its internationalism. International music is born from national music; otherwise you become a mere cosmopolitan without any background. . . .

In renouncing the traditions of our classical heritage, our formalist composers have also departed from the sound principle of programme music. Nowadays it has become a trade to "interpret" the meaning of music, after it has already been composed. Yet classical Russian music was, in the main, programme music.

We also often hear the word "innovation". Is not this word used as propaganda of bad music? Stunts and contortions are not innovation. Innovation does not always mean progress, yet young composers are taught that if they don't "innovate" they will not be original. Moreover, the "innovation" of our formalists isn't particularly new in any case; for it smells of the decadent, bourgeois music of Europe and America. Now here's a case when one can talk of epigones!

Let me take a parallel. Painting is your sister—one of the Muses. Bourgeois influences were strong in our painting at one time, and these influences used to fly all kinds of "Left" banners—futurism, cubism, modernism: "Down with the rotten academic canons!" they cried. It was a madhouse. They would paint a girl with one hand and forty legs. . . . It all ended in a complete fiasco. The Party fully restored the importance of our classical heritage in painting as represented by such masters as Repin, Surikov, Vasnetsov, Brullov, Vereschagin. . . . Were we not right to rescue this treasure house of classical painting, and to smash the liquidators of painting? The C.C. was then

accused of being "traditionalist" and "conservative". What rubbish!

There is a lot of talk of "epigonism", and the young are taught not to learn from the classics. "The classics must be surpassed", they are told. That's all very well, but it is first necessary to reach their level. And to be quite candid, and to express what the Soviet listener really feels, it would not be bad at all if we produced a lot of works which *were* like the work of the Russian classics, in content, form, elegance, and musical beauty. If that is "epigonism", well, then, "Good for the epigones", I say.

Now for naturalism. . . . Is it not true that drums and timpani must be an exception and not the rule in music? I must say that a whole number of works by modern composers are so full of naturalistic noises that they remind one—if you'll forgive this inelegant simile—of either a dentist's drill or a musical gas-wagon, the kind the Gestapo used. One just can't take it. (*Laughter and cheers.*)

Here we go beyond all the limits of the rational, beyond the limits of normal human emotions, beyond the limits of human reason. There are, it is true, some modern theories, according to which the pathological state of a man is a higher form of existence; and, in their delirium, schizophrenics and paranoics, we are told, can rise to spiritual heights inaccessible to normal people. This is typical of the rotting state of bourgeois culture. But let us leave these theories to lunatics and let us demand from our composers that they produce normal human music. . . .

It may surprise you that the C.C. of the Bolsheviks should demand beautiful and elegant music from you. But we mean it; we want music that would satisfy the æsthetic requirements and the artistic tastes of the Soviet People, and these requirements have grown immensely. Our People appreciate musical works if they deeply reflect the spirit of our time, and if they are accessible to the wide masses.

A work of genius in music is not a work that can be appreciated by only a handful of æsthetic gourmets. Genius is measured by its depth, and content, by its craftsmanship, by the number of people it can inspire, and by the number of people who accept it. Not all that is accessible is a work of genius, but a real work of genius is one that is accessible, and the more accessible it is to the widest masses of the people, the more clearly is it a work of genius. . . .

As you sow, so you shall reap. Composers who hope that future generations will appreciate them, or that the people will "grow up in time to appreciate them", are utterly wrong. Music that is unintelligible to the people is unwanted by the people. Let them not blame the

people. Let them blame themselves. They've got to understand why they do not appeal to the people, and they've got to reform their work accordingly. Isn't that the right way? (*A voice: "That's right!"*)

As for craftsmanship, you need not be afraid of following in the footsteps of the classics. To write as they did requires more craftsmanship than the formalist music that is now written. . . . It is also true that the people want different *genres*. Why are you so unlike the great masters of the past? You are much meaner to the people than they were. They wrote vocal music, choral music, orchestral music, and did not confine themselves to any one style. . . . Also, you neglect the requirements and the possibilities of the human voice in writing allegedly vocal music. And then there are stunts like using the piano as a percussion instrument. All this is not good enough.

All these are violations of the rules of musical art, of the functions of musical sound. They are also violations of the rules of normal human hearing. Unfortunately our science has not taught us enough about the physiological effect of music on the human organism. Yet one must bear in mind that bad, disharmonious music undoubtedly has a bad effect on the psycho-physiological activity of man. . . .

Comrades, if you value the high name of Soviet composer, you must prove that you can serve your people better than you have done so far. A severe test lies before you. Formalist tendencies were severely condemned by the Party twelve years ago. In the interval the Government has conferred Stalin Prizes on many of you, including those who sinned in the formalist direction. . . . We did not consider, when we gave you these prizes, that your works were free of faults, but we were patient, and waited for you to choose the right road. Now, clearly, the Party has had to intervene. If you continue on the road you have hitherto followed, our music will win no glory. . . .

You must develop and perfect Soviet music. You must also be vigilant in not allowing any decadent Western influences to penetrate into it. The U.S.S.R. is not only the champion of humanity's musical culture, it is in all other respects the bulwark of human civilisation against bourgeois cultural decay. Your political hearing must become as acute as your musical hearing. . . . We fervently hope that like the "Mighty Kuchka" i.e. Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Mussorgsky, Balakirev, and Cui, who amazed the world in the past, so we shall have an even mightier "Soviet Kuchka" now. We want you to be the mighty cohort of Soviet Music, of whom the Soviet people would be proud. (*Long, stormy applause.*)

BASS-LEBEDINETZ (Kiev Conservatory): The speech by Andrei Alexandrovich has not only moved me deeply, but has shattered me. Can one possibly add another word to what he said? With truth, clarity, and depth he revealed to us the organisational and inner content of the whole musical process, and pointed out those unhealthy phenomena which are hampering the development of Soviet musical culture. . . . Now we know exactly what we have to do. . . .

I. V. NESTIEV (Moscow Radio Committee): We receive numerous letters from radio listeners. There is an enormous and ever-growing interest in serious music. Recently we received many letters from workers, students and others—ordinary people, mind you, not specialists—expressing disappointment at Shostakovich's *Song of the Motherland* fantasia, and saying they had expected him to do better for the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Revolution. . . . Many critical letters were also received on account of Prokofiev's *War and Peace*. . . .

Soviet symphonic music is often sharply attacked. This is the sort of thing people write: "Why do I listen with such joy to Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Chopin, Borodin, Rachmaninov, and why do I feel no joy, and don't understand what it's all about, when I listen to some modern Soviet music?"

The question arises: for whom is this music written? On the Radio Committee we resort to half-measures: we broadcast modern works on the second and third programmes—for "connoisseurs". Or we play them during "slack" periods in the afternoon. (*Laughter*.) . . . It is not very flattering to composers when their music has to be hidden from a larger audience. . . . A large part of Soviet music is unintelligible, as though written in cypher. Only a very select audience—often limited to the Small Hall of the Conservatory—can like it. . . .

Goethe said: "He who has no hope of having a million readers should not write a single line." This should be remembered by our composers. . . .

Now for our musical links with the West. The performance of Soviet music abroad is a matter of the utmost importance. The success of a good work with a progressive foreign audience must be regarded as a success for our ideology, as a means of persuasion exercised on ordinary people in the West. But there is the other side of the medal. Some of our composers pay too much attention to the reception their works has been given abroad, to what Kussevitsky or Stokowski said, or to what the American papers wrote. . . .

A few years ago, the British critic, Gerald Abraham, published a

book on eight of the foremost Soviet composers, in which he complained that the Bolsheviks had made composers write too simply, and that they were losing their originality. Is there not, in some of our recent works, a desire not to disappoint these "erudite" foreign listeners? . . .

Many of us, including myself, were often guided, in our critical discussions, by a belief in the mission of our great composers, by a pious attitude towards their talent, by personal tastes, rather than by the demands of Soviet æsthetics or the interests of the People as a whole. . . .

Twelve years ago, after some very severe criticism from the Party of the existing formalist tendencies, many of our composers properly understood this criticism. . . . Let us hope that, as a result of the present instructions by the Party, we shall produce even more brilliant works which will reflect all the greatness of our magnificent epoch.

SHOSTAKOVICH: I apologise for speaking for the second time; but when I last spoke I did not use up the time allotted to me. I am not going back on what I said before. I simply want to add a few things. . . . Regarding Muradeli, his opera includes characters of different nationalities; but, unlike Glinka in *Ruslan and Ludmilla*, he did not differentiate between the different nationalities. It does not follow that one has to use folk songs textually; there is not a single folk-song "quotation" in *Ivan Susanin*, yet the folk character of the music is sufficiently apparent. His people's choruses, including the magnificent "Glory"—true work of genius—are all perfectly original. One can follow another course—Rimsky-Korsakov's—and that is, work on folk-lore material. . . . But in Muradeli we find either ordinary "oriental" music, or music of the French-Italian variety—something rather like Thomas, Massenet or Puccini. I don't think he has sufficient ability to solve his problems. . . .

I am very glad that he has recognised his faults; but it seems to me that he blamed other people and outside circumstances far too much for his failure. He talked as if he had consciously written a bad opera, i.e. that he knew exactly how to write a good opera, but that because he was badly taught, he still wrote a bad one. The atmosphere in the musical world was such, he also suggested, that he did not write as he would have liked to write, or as he could have written. Now, I think that every composer must first and foremost hold himself responsible for his work and for his failures. . . .

I do not mean that we should not carefully examine our organisa-

tional problems. . . . But it seems to me that our music, with all its faults, and despite many unsuccessful works, is still advancing along a wide front—symphonies, oratorios, chamber music, songs, and so on. I do not know another country where music is advancing along such a wide front. It is possible only in our country. . . .

Now a few words about myself. In my work I have had many failures, even though, throughout my composer's career, I have always thought of the People, of my listeners, of those who reared me; and I always strive that the People should accept my music. I have always listened to criticism, and have always tried to work harder and better. I am listening to criticism now, and shall continue to listen to it, and shall accept critical instructions. . . .

I think that our three days' discussions will be of the greatest value, especially if we closely study Comrade Zhdanov's speech. I, no doubt like others, should like to have the text of his speech. A close study of this remarkable document should help us greatly in our work.

ZHDANOV: Comrades, thirty-two persons put down their names to speak; thirty have spoken. I have received chits asking that we close the discussion. What is the feeling here? Who is in favour of closing the discussion? Who is against it? Two are against. The discussion is closed.

What conclusions may be drawn from our discussion? The C.C. will take into consideration what has been said here, and draw the necessary conclusions. The creative workers must also take account of the results of this discussion. And now, allow me to close the meeting. (*Cheers.*)

THE PARTY'S VICTORY

WHAT IS FORMALISM?

BEFORE COMING to the aftermath of the Decree of 10th February, it is important to get one point straight. What is "formalism", as understood by the Soviet authorities to-day? The answer, as we now know, is this: "formalism" is, in fact, an insufficiently wholehearted attitude towards Soviet Communism. It is no longer an æsthetic, but a political concept. Neither Zhdanov, nor any of the new high officials of the Composers' Union, like Khrennikov, have said this in so many words; but it was explained, with the authorities' obvious approval, by a woman teacher of "theory", by name N. Brusova, at the Composers' Meeting in Moscow soon after the publication of the Decree. She said:

Formalism is usually considered to denote a lack of ideas, a lack of content, a complete concentration on form . . . with no reference to reality. In "theory" classes our pupils are sometimes taught to write such exercises in composition. Such "works" are sometimes also written by composers, when they are not creatively alive. . . .

But when we speak of formalism to-day, we mean something entirely different. One cannot say that the works of Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Miaskovsky, Khachaturian, and others are completely divorced from life and reality, or completely lacking in content. Nevertheless, these works have a strong formalist basis. We feel that there is something in these works that prevents them from penetrating simply and directly into our consciousness, and prevents us from seeing life and the world reflected in the feeling and consciousness of these composers. Undoubtedly the composers, or the more truthful among them, felt this too, even before the Decree, but refused fully to realise it, and believed that things were all right as they were, and that, without this camouflage, their works would not be on "a sufficiently high level".

This, however, is not the kind of camouflage you can simply rub off, the kind of mist that will lift, after which there will shine a pure, clear, sunny reality in all its radiance. These men do not lack vision; their vision is distorted.

Socialist realism, as we know, does not require from the artist

any sort of abstract objectivism, but an understanding of the true road of life. . . . Formalism manifests itself whenever the composer shows an insufficient creative will to follow this road of life's fundamentals to the utmost limit of his consciousness. If he is creatively lazy, he will stop at the beginning of the road, and the thread that leads him to the final goal snaps. His musical images, as a result, become vague, incomplete, and distorted.

When this happens, it may be due not only to laziness, but to a lack of boldness and courage. Hence the tendency to imitate Western bourgeois art and contemporary modernism. In such cases the composer has not the strength to look our great future straight in the face. . . . The composer must struggle against this tendency to distort, against this laziness, this lack of courage; and in this struggle he should be greatly helped by the stern, but friendly care shown him by the Party.

We know of examples when formalists have successfully overcome these difficulties. . . . We accept with all our heart Khachaturian's "Song of Stalin" in his *Poem of Stalin*. We cannot fail to hear something that is very near and dear to us in Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony. . . . This shows that there are great sources of strength in our Soviet composers.

Any deviations from the true road, any mental laziness, and lack of creative courage are, therefore, all the more inexcusable among men who live in the land of the Soviets, who have been brought up on the teaching of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin, and who see before themselves, the great road of the Soviet people towards Communism, the highest stage of life.

This is important as a definition of formalism, even though to many western ears it may sound like gibberish. Brusova's observations were, in fact, tolerant in comparison with the still more "official" line taken, after the C.C. Decree, by the new chiefs of the Composers' Union—Zakharov, Khrennikov and Chulaki—who had replaced the disgraced Khachaturian, Shostakovich, Kabalevsky and the rest of the formalists.

KHRENNIKOV'S "MARXIST" INTERPRETATION OF SHOSTAKOVICH AND PROKOFIEV

At two conferences—the meeting of Moscow composers and music critics in February, soon after the Decree, and the All-

Union Composers' Congress in April—Khrennikov, the new Secretary-General of the Composers' Union, laid down the Party Line in two very long speeches, each purporting to be a history of Soviet music since the Revolution.

In these two speeches Khrennikov performed, before the musicians, the same function that Fadeyev performs at the Writers' Union. There was not one appreciative word about a single one of the "condemned" composers.

Miaskovsky was mentioned only a few times—once, in connection with his Sixth Symphony, of which Khrennikov said: "The Revolution [here] appears as something fearful and chaotic, breaking into the artist's life. Reality appears as something fearful and horrible to the depressed artist." Not a word of tribute to the great work done by Miaskovsky in maintaining the high professional traditions of Russian music.

In a casual reference, his Twelfth (Kolkhoz) symphony was quoted simply as an indication that, at one point of his career, he was beginning to get a glimmering of what was wanted, but did not stick to the "only right road".

Khachaturian, too, was mentioned only briefly, and then only in connection with his less successful works, such as his cello concerto and his *Symphonic Poem*, which, like Prokofiev's *Ode on the End of the War* (with its harps, eight pianos, brass, and no strings) is an amusing extravaganza and no more. (It is true that the lack of solemnity shown by both these composers on two such solemn occasions as the end of the war and the thirtieth Anniversary of the Revolution was enough to rub many an earnest Party member the wrong way.) Khachaturian's fine and popular violin and piano concertos and ballet music were simply ignored.

When he came to Shostakovich and Prokofiev, Khrennikov's treatment of "history" was really a masterpiece of "Marxist" distortion. In his early Leningrad days, Shostakovich undoubtedly did dabble for a time in Western modernism; there was, especially in Leningrad during the 'twenties, a vogue for modern German composers like Alban Berg and Hindemith. Shostakovich was a youth of infinite vitality and curiosity; Russia had started on her new revolutionary existence, and, for young com-

posers, it was a period of *Sturm und Drang*. Mayakovsky was the poet of that age. Small wonder if young Shostakovich threw himself into that exciting, extravagant world of novelty and experiment. Yet he had a sense of moderation where his own work was concerned; his First Symphony, which took Russia by storm, and made him world-famous, was a work of extraordinary freshness, and beauty, and not "modernist" in any sense open to criticism. But did Khrennikov as much as mention it? No. Instead, he concentrated all the guns of his heavy sarcasm on Shostakovich's admittedly "silly period", when he wrote his ultra-modernist, deliberately disharmonious, though tremendously dynamic, Second and Third Symphonies, and delighted in extravagant and *grotesque* forms, which were to find their fullest expression in his opera, *The Nose*, based on Gogol's equally *grotesque* and extravagant story.

Shostakovich's *Nose* is an extravaganza, and also a "period piece" just as much as Mayakovsky's *Misteria-Bouffe*, Meyerhold's production of Gogol's *Revisor*, the drawings of Nathan Altman, and the "industrial" ballets and music of Deshevov and Mossolov were period pieces. If anything, they showed that Shostakovich was very much a child of his age; and in those early years of the Revolution—up to the early 'thirties—nobody was seriously expected to be "traditionalist". Did anybody ever ask Mayakovsky to "write like Pushkin"—or ask young Shostakovich, for that matter, to "write like Tchaikovsky"?

Young Shostakovich, perhaps with the success of his First Symphony gone to his head, was no doubt exuberant and rather silly at times. However, the taboos of the "Zhdanov Era" had not yet come into force, and Shostakovich was, in those days, a most uninhibited young man. And so, in 1934, he composed his *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, based on that powerful Leskov story of a monstrously wicked and sensuous woman. There was something in the subject that specially attracted him.

But let us face it. To-day, in decent Communist society sex is profoundly shocking. I remember, soon after the Decree of February 10, meeting Khrennikov at a Molotov reception, and he started talking about Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. He was positively grundyish. "Ugh," he said, "why, he gives

you there a musical rendering of—ugh!—the Sexual Act!!” I remarked that, after all, Wagner had done much the same in *Tristan* and the *Walküre*. “Ugh, yes, horrible,” said Khrennikov, “but Shostakovich is *even more naturalistic, even more horrible!*”

Khrennikov, in his “history”, did not mention Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony, which according to all the views expressed since 1938, showed that he had mended his ways, and had taken to writing good, serene, intelligible, and beautiful music. (The official theory now was that he had been “over-praised”, and that the Fifth Symphony had not nearly enough Socialist realism in it.) Khrennikov could not, however, ignore the famous Seventh (Leningrad) Symphony altogether. What he said, to denigrate it, was:

Shostakovich’s musical thought turned out to be more suitable for depicting the sinister images of Fascism and his own world of subjective reflections, than for giving substance to the heroic images of our age. The abstract a-tonalism, the cosmopolitan musical language of Shostakovich who, even during the war, did not try to come any nearer the musical language of our People, have prevented the Seventh Symphony from being lastingly popular.

The rest of Shostakovich’s later work was dismissed by Khrennikov as “frantically gloomy and neurotic”. In this, of course, there is a grain of truth: Shostakovich is a highly sensitive artist, and he has his moments of deep gloom and “neuroticism”, and is incapable of seeing the whole of life through the eyes of a *Pravda* editorial. The Khrennikovs are not likely, with their speeches, to make him any more happy about the world.



Khachaturian is perhaps more adaptable, and he will survive. But whether he will be creatively happy is quite another matter. Soon after the Decree, a Bulgarian Government delegation, with Mr. Dimitrov at its head, came to Moscow, and gave a reception. The Decree had made a deplorable impression abroad, and had,

of course, played into the hands of every kind of anti-Soviet propagandist. *Time* and *Life* and *Newsweek* had all become terrific Shostakovich fans, and defenders of all the "persecuted musicians". Khachaturian, obviously sent to the Bulgarian party to do a little counter-propaganda among the foreign correspondents and diplomats, was perfectly willing to talk. His line was that "it shouldn't be taken too seriously": the Central Committee, in its Decree, had simply laid down certain principles and given certain indications, and it would now be for the Composers themselves to sort out the good from the bad. And he added, a little wistfully:

"There is going to be a reassessment of a lot of things; some of the works that I considered least important—such as some of my ballet music—will now be treated as important, and—"

"And your violin concerto," I said, "will be considered less important?"

"Well yes, I suppose so. Personally I prefer it to a lot of my other works—but things are going to be different now."

In fact, they were to become even more different than he had expected. In April *Pravda* reported with great approval that Chulaki, a little-known composer from Leningrad, who had just received a Stalin Prize for a "tuneful" symphony, had declared at the Composers' Congress: "Enough of these attempts to distinguish between the bad works and the good works of the formalist composers! All their works stink, and all these attempts to differentiate between good and bad are merely tricks for leaving a lot of loopholes open for a continuation of formalist influences in Soviet music!"

But as the "non-formalists" had not written any serious music of real worth, the "formalists" could not, in practice, be dispensed with altogether—at least for the present. For two months not a single work by Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Miaskovsky, or Shebalin was played anywhere in Moscow; the concert programmes were all Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Schubert; Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Brahms; Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Tchaikovsky. But, by the end of April, one or two Prokofiev works were allowed to be played, and the concert programmes for the Winter, 1948-49, season included a sprinkling of Proko-

fiev, Khachaturian, and Miaskovsky. Shostakovich did not figure in the list; but, by May, the Bolshoi Theatre had begun to play Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella* ballets again.

This did not mean that Prokofiev was in the Central Committee's good books again; indeed, Khrennikov's treatment of Prokofiev was just as vindictive as his treatment of any of the other "formalists". In his "historical" addresses, he went out of his way to make Prokofiev out to be an alien influence in Russian music. Having enumerated at length the foreign modernist, decadent, pathological, erotic, cacophonous, religious or sexually perverted monsters—including Olivier Messiaen, Jolivet, Hindemith, Alban Berg, Menotti, and Benjamin Britten—Khrennikov proceeded to tell Prokofiev how wicked and Western *he* was.

Now, of all the Soviet composers, Prokofiev (if I may be allowed a personal but widely-shared opinion) is the most prodigious, and one who has come nearer to being a "world classic" than any other. His *Classical* and Fifth Symphonies especially are among the great works of the symphonic repertory, as are his glorious piano concertos, especially the First and Third, and his violin concertos, especially when played by Heifetz, Menuhin, or Szegety. His piano music is perhaps the finest gift to the pianist made by anyone since the death of Brahms. His music abounds in Russianisms, and his *Alexander Nevsky* and his *Ode to Stalin*, with the exquisite melody of its introduction, which Khrennikov could not write if he lived a million years, are among the few great choral works of modern music. He has also written the fairest ballet music of this century—*The Three Oranges*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella*, all of which are, in fact, highly popular in Russia. He can be *grotesque* (in the French sense), "hooligan," satirical, and gay; he can be lyrical, and sophisticated and child-like, as he is in *Peter and the Wolf* and in his *Children's Pieces* for piano. Everybody in the West will agree that he is the most complete and many-sided of all Russia's composers to-day, with a versatility and craftsmanship equal to that of the greatest masters of music.

What, then, had Khrennikov to say about Prokofiev? He ignored completely the fact that Prokofiev represented, around 1910, the healthiest possible reaction against the stale, Arensky

type of drawing-room music, on the one hand and, against the true decadence of the Skriabin school on the other, and that Prokofiev was in music very much what Mayakovsky was in poetry. Instead, he went out of his way to identify Prokofiev with Stravinsky and Diaghilev—alleging that all three represented “closer to the West at any price” ideas, and that, in presenting an exotic, Petrushka-like vision of Russia to the West, all three lampooned their own country in front of foreign audiences. And “it all ended in Monte Carlo, where the Diaghilev Ballet found its right mission at last—to cater to an audience of gamblers, profiteers, and prostitutes,” Khrennikov concluded.

Khrennikov, with characteristic meanness, then made capital out of the fact that Prokofiev was really an *émigré* (though, unlike Stravinsky, he had had the sense to return to Russia in 1934), and that vile foreign influences had, in fact, marred his work through and through. Without saying a single word about Prokofiev’s best work either before or after his return to Russia, Khrennikov dismissed all his later compositions as “formalist and unsuccessful”. So is musical “history” written.

But one may guess that, for all his “Russianising” and his genius, Prokofiev was considered fundamentally “too European” and not really properly “Soviet.” Whatever he did, he would be, even in his simplest works, essentially sophisticated.

PROKOFIEV RECANTS BUT NOT QUITE

The first statement made by Prokofiev after the Decree (it will be remembered that he did not speak—as far as is known—at the Zhdanov meeting) was a letter he sent to the Musicians’ Meeting in Moscow soon after the Decree was published. It was addressed jointly to Mr. Lebedev, who, as head of the Art Committee, had by now succeeded the unfortunate Mr. Khrapchenko, and to Khrennikov, who had succeeded Khachaturian as Secretary-General of the Composers’ Union. In this letter Prokofiev paid all the necessary compliments to the Party, and promised to do his best in future, but, in effect, he rejected the general accusation against him as a “formalist”. He made a concession to his addressees by blaming foreign influences for his earlier lapses.

The letter began by saying that, owing to ill-health, he was not

able to attend the meeting, but that he wished to express his views about the C.C.'s decree.

This Decree . . . has separated the healthy tissues from the dead tissues in the work of our composers. However painful this may be to many composers, including myself, I welcome the Decree, which creates conditions for restoring the health of Soviet music. The Decree is valuable in having demonstrated how alien formalism is to the Soviet peoples. . . .

There have been formalist elements in my music for the last fifteen or twenty years. The infection must have been caused through contact with certain Western currents. After *Pravda's* criticism of Shostakovich's opera in 1936, I gave much thought to the whole question, and came to the conclusion that formalism was wrong. . . .

As a result, I looked for a clearer musical language, and one with more content. In a number of my subsequent works I tried to get rid of formalist elements, and I believe I succeeded in this to some extent. . . . If there is still some formalism in some of my works it is probably due to my insufficient realisation that our people do not want such music.

But Prokofiev's letter was not all humble pie. There is an undercurrent of sarcasm in the following passage, and a clear allusion to the Khrennikovs and Zakharovs, with their "popular hits".

I never had the slightest doubt about the importance of melody, and consider it by far the most important element in music. *Nothing is more difficult than to discover a melody which would be immediately understandable even to the uninitiated listener and, at the same time, be original. Here the composer is beset by numerous dangers: he is apt to become trivial and vulgar, or else dish out a repetition of something already heard before.* In this connection I must say that the composition of complicated melodies is much easier than that of simple melodies. Sometimes it also happens that a composer messes about so long with a melody that, in the end, he lengthens and complicates it unduly. Such mistakes I have sometimes made myself. *One must be particularly vigilant to make a melody simple, but without allowing it to become cheap, sickly, or imitative rubbish.*

Comrades Khrennikov and Co. could put it in their pipes and smoke it.

Prokofiev then said that his lapses into a-tonalism were rare, and that he considered that the Schoenberg school of a-tonal music was getting nowhere. Regarding opera, he admitted that he had given preference to recitative, but that this was, partly, because he loved the theatre and hated to see actors singing away for an hour, glued to one spot, as they sometimes did in Wagner operas.

However, in the new opera he was now writing he would strike a happy medium. It would have as its subject Polevoi's *Story of a Real Man*—the tale of an heroic fighter-pilot who, after losing both legs, trained himself to become a fighter-pilot again. In this opera, he would make use of some of the folk-song material he had gathered in northern Russia, and would make the harmonies as simple as possible. In short, Prokofiev clearly went out of his way to show that he did not consider himself beaten, and that he was going to make the best of a bad job. What his private feelings were about the whole thing one can easily guess.

The handling by the press and even by a periodical like *Soviet Music* of the two Composers' meetings—one in February, the other in April—was extremely tendentious. Almost unlimited space was given to speeches supporting the Party Line, while "opposition" speeches were reported in only a few words, accompanied by sarcastic comments. Thus, while Khrennikov's speech at the February meeting was given nine pages in *Soviet Music*, Shebalin's was given ten lines, which began with the words: "Shebalin made an entirely unsatisfactory statement." In fact, what he really said was not revealed to the readers at all. The Central Committee having laid down the law, the "opposition" were not allowed any more publicity, except when they uttered words of repentance as notably Shostakovich did. Miaskovsky ignored the meetings.

THE STRANGE CASE OF PROFESSOR ASAFIEV

The strangest case at the April Congress was that of Professor Asafiev. He had, throughout, been praised to the skies by the press as the greatest authority on Soviet music; and, as recently as 1947, he had described Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Miaskovsky, and Soviet symphonism generally as "the pride and glory

of Soviet music". It will also be remembered that he was not present at the Zhdanov meeting, where Khrennikov remarked in passing that Asafiev was "very ill".

Between then and April no written or spoken word by Asafiev concerning the C.C. Decree was published. Yet, when the April Congress opened, it started with an introductory address by Asafiev—a written address, read out by one Vlassov in Asafiev's absence. The address lost little time in repeating, almost word-for-word, the C.C. Decree:

"Despite certain successes by our composers in song-writing and in cinema music, we have still failed in our duty to the People. The state of affairs in modern Soviet music is alarming and unsatisfactory, and anti-People formalism is strong. . . . Some of our so-called "leading" composers are infected by contemporary decadent bourgeois formalism. . . .

To do Asafiev justice, his address contained no direct attacks on particular works which he had previously praised. But the whole tone of the address was, nevertheless, so much in contradiction with what he had written only a few months before, and it paraphrased dutifully so many of the phrases from the Decree, that one can only conclude that it was very heavily sub-edited. The Party had decided that Asafiev must be made to support the Reform. Whether he approved of the official version of his address was quite immaterial. And then, as if to show the world that the Party, the Government and Asafiev were in complete agreement, a Stalin Prize of 100,000 roubles was awarded to Asafiev, a few days later, for his (admittedly excellent) book on Glinka.

In fact, nobody in Moscow who knew anything of the musical world and of Asafiev's previous views could quite believe that his address represented his honest and candid opinion. In his old age and feeble health it may have seemed to him impossible to rebel. It may have been impressed upon him that State reasons demanded this address. That he wrote many passages, concerned chiefly with "the traditions of classical music" seems obvious; but that he wrote it all—above all the passages concern-

ing contemporary composers—seems highly doubtful. The Asafiev Affair remains, in any case, one of the most disturbing incidents in this whole disturbing business, so rich in intrigue and “rough justice”.

AND WHAT NOW?

What is one to conclude from it all? Until the end of 1947, Russian music was the one art in Russia which, in terms of Western-European values, still continued to thrive. Painting was artistically negligible. Literature was becoming more and more mechanical—except for a few rare books, which were almost like lucky flukes, such as a short novel by Kazakevich, called *The Star*. Music alone was not yet regimented. What was to be done? The composers, above all the “Big Composers”, must be told to change their whole creative processes; they must write, not the sort of thing that they think best, but what the Party thinks best. In short, a high quality trade must become a utility trade.

Some can adapt themselves to such demands more easily than others—not with joy but in a spirit of “Blast you! Take the damned thing!” That was, clearly, Khachaturian’s attitude. Such was also perhaps Prokofiev’s attitude—unless he feels sufficiently healthy and cynical to write a magnificent pastiche of a Glinka opera, just as, in the past, he wrote his *Classical* Symphony—which is, in effect, a delicious pastiche of Mozart. But that would not solve anything in the long run. Zhdanov destroyed a great nucleus of musical culture—and he did it quite deliberately. Will Russian music now descend to a low “utility” level, just as the other arts have done? All one can say is that no true artist can have his creative processes violated as they were violated by Zhdanov.

Was it really necessary? . . . The Communist Party of the Soviet Union had surely had a good deal of experience in these matters. For years, it prided itself on having achieved wonderful results with an occasional warning, like the *Pravda* article on Shostakovich in 1936, followed by persuasion and encouragement. Granted that some 1947 works were not “satisfactory”—would not another warning have been sufficient? But that was clearly no

longer Zhdanov's object. He did not want any more Fifth Symphonies from Shostakovich; Zhdanov wanted a clean sweep, so much so that if to-day Shostakovich wrote something on the lines of the Fifth Symphony, he would probably not receive loud praise, as he did in 1938, but abuse. The February Decree was infinitely more drastic and revolutionary (or reactionary) than the mere Party *guidance* contained in the *Pravda* attack on Shostakovich in 1936. Was not the whole thing grossly overdone? For there is a vast difference between *guidance* and *dictation*.

Zhdanov died on August 31st, but the policy did not die with him. He had added, perhaps, to the whole process a certain ruthlessness which others might have avoided. One feels that Shcherbakov, had he been alive, would have handled the matter rather differently. He did not love Zhdanov. Even so, Zhdanov's policy on music, as on literature, is part of a general policy of anti-*élite* and exclusively "popular" art. This, in turn, is part of the conditioning process through which the Soviet people must be put before they attain the state of complete Communism, or before a war starts with America. Is this policy going to be modified in any foreseeable future? It is not altogether impossible. Russian policy in the past has been full of zig-zags. Perhaps the first promising sign of a reaction to the present art policy is to be found in the recent attack on Gerasimov, the painter-laureate of the Stalin régime, in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, which declared that his official paintings of Stalin, Lenin, etc., were lifeless, dreary, uninspiring, and a bore. Perhaps it is a good sign, too, that recently, since the death of Zhdanov, the Soviet press should have praised Shostakovich's music for the new film, *The Young Guard*, for being "realistic"—though it would still be a tragedy if Shostakovich were to limit his great original genius to writing to order occasional bits of music for approved films.

On what has happened in the creative field since the stormy days described in this book only a brief interim report is possible at the moment, based chiefly on the proceedings of the Plenary Meetings of the Composers' Union which were held in Moscow between December 21 and 29, 1948. During these meetings no fewer than a hundred new compositions were heard, and although some

speakers complained that "it was all too much to take in, and to give a considered judgment on these new works", the officials of the Composers' Union, and especially Khrennikov—working in close contact with the Central Committee—felt themselves in a position to draw a number of conclusions.

The main conclusion was that Soviet Music had successfully entered a new stage, and that there was some progress to report, as a result of the Zhdanov Reform.

It seems, nevertheless, curious that of the works singled out for praise by Khrennikov, the majority should not have been works by Russian composers, but by non-Russians—the *Fatherland Cantata* by Aratunian, an Armenian composer; a symphonic work by Amirov, an Azerbaijan composer; a *Stalin Cantata* by Wirkka, an Estonian; another *Stalin Cantata* by Tallat-Kelpsha, a Lithuanian; a violin concerto by Dvarionas, another Lithuanian; a piano concerto by Gasanov, a native of Daghestan in the Caucasus; and a *Simfonietta* by the Jewish composer, Weinberg. It is reasonable to suppose that a certain folk-lorish parochialism in some of these works must have appealed to the officials of the Composers' Union.

But what of the great highroad of Russian Music? Apart from a few polite remarks about a new symphony by a young composer, V. Bunin, and two or three other works, there seemed very little to report. None of the pundits of the Composers' Union—Khrennikov and the rest—appear to have produced anything of the least importance—so busy were they, it seems, re-educating the others.

It was interesting and indeed, gratifying to learn that, despite all the fearful knocks they had received, the Big Four and the other "formalists" had not given up. Even old man Miaskovsky, bitterly hurt by the treatment he had suffered at the hands of Zhdanov, had, as usual, produced his annual symphony. Khrennikov said:

"The new works of the composers who were denounced by the Central Committee as formalists, naturally attracted special attention at the Plenary Meetings. The most successful works by these composers were Shostakovich's music for the film, *The Young Guard*,

and a number of choral works by Muradeli. Extracts from Khachaturian's music for the new *Lenin* film, Miaskovsky's *Symphony on Russian Folk Themes*, and Shebalin's Seventh Quartet showed that these composers were trying to take the road of realism, and were not altogether unsuccessful in their attempts. But the Plenary Meeting nevertheless found that there were still some formalist elements in their work, and that their transformation was proceeding rather slowly." (*Pravda*, January 4, 1949).

Other leaders of the Composers' Union remarked that while these composers were now refraining from "the cruder manifestations of formalism", they were "not yet sufficiently organically welded to the ideals of Communist civilisation". To be damned with faint praise must have been almost welcome!

If Shostakovich was, a year ago, the principal target of the anti-formalists, Prokofiev now took the place of Surviving Formalist Number One.

His opera, *The Story of a Real Man*—dealing with the life of a heroic fighter pilot was dismissed by Khrennikov as "anti-melodious", "modernist" and "lacking in a real understanding of Soviet heroism and Soviet humanity".

Since the general public will not be allowed to hear the opera (nor will it be allowed to be exported abroad) one has to take Khrennikov's word for it that Prokofiev's new opera is no good. It seems hard, all the same, to believe that a work on which a composer of Prokofiev's calibre worked for over a year, should only be fit for the waste-paper basket. Nor is it easy to believe that Prokofiev, who is a great melodist, and who, moreover, promised to concentrate on melody in this opera, should have completely failed to fulfil his "norm". Is it unreasonable to suppose that Shostakovich's meekness last year and Prokofiev's relative independence and even truculence had some influence on Khrennikov's "verdict"! The discouraging effect of all this on Prokofiev, who is fifty-eight and in poor health, can be imagined. How different it all is from the adulation he was receiving only eighteen months before in Moscow, or from his great pre-war triumphs in Western Europe and America!

Amongst the numerous speeches at the Plenary Meetings later

reported in the press, there are none by the "formalists" or "ex-formalists"; the press reports of these meetings were extremely one-sided, and no unorthodox opinions were quoted at all.

It is curious that in spite of all the speeches made by Zhdanov and the other protagonists of "art for the people" last year, in favour of starting a splendid new era of Soviet opera, no opera, (apart from Prokofiev's) should have been composed, and that the best works (in Khrennikov's estimation) produced in the last year should have been orchestral works, plus a few *Stalin* and *Fatherland* cantatas.

True, Khrennikov and some others promised at the meeting to complete their operas "shortly". So one must suspend judgment for the present.

Altogether, however, the first year in which Soviet music was rigidly regimented by the Central Committee does not appear to have been outstandingly successful; perhaps the second year will be. But during the first year even the popular songs and the military marches, we are told, were not up to standard. One must have patience.

Yet there is at least one point which Stalin and his advisers should bear in mind. Their art policy has caused Russia more harm abroad, among the Left-wing, and predominantly pro-Soviet intelligentsia, than anything else. Czechoslovakia, Poland and other countries have adopted a planned economy, and think very highly of many features of the Soviet economic system. Politically, too, Russia has had a profound influence on the post-war structure of many States. Russia is considered, among millions of people, to be the one country that has something to offer, in the way of political and economic ideas and organisation, to the colonial and semi-colonial peoples of Asia and Africa. Soviet ideas of economic justice are one of the most potent ideological weapons in the world; and when millions and millions of Chinese coolies are being turned into self-respecting citizens, it seems perhaps silly to worry about the future of Prokofiev's work. Yet the treatment of the artist by the State is still something very important.

The most powerful Communist Party in the West, that in France has the strongest mental reservations about Soviet art

policy. In Poland and Czechoslovakia, the whole Communist and Left-wing intelligentsia are perturbed and embarrassed by what has happened in Russia in the field of culture. In Warsaw recently a Polish Communist remarked to me: "Glory to the Soviet Union, and glory to the Red Army that tore the guts out of the German army, as your Mr. Churchill said, but thank God we haven't got a Lysenko, a Fadeyev, or a Khrennikov dictatorship yet." We were walking down the Krakowskie Przedmiescie, and as he pointed to the war-battered statue of Copernicus, he remarked: "Copernicus, Galileo and all that; it does make you think twice."

But, having thought twice, he added: "Of course, these damned Russians are an astonishing people. What seems, and is, cruel, crude, inhuman, and ridiculous as a short-term policy, often turns out to be—after some modification—something truly constructive once it has become a long-term policy. With these infernal people one can never be quite sure!"

How true was this, and how sincere was he? I wondered. But in any case, what a price to pay—in terms of warped individualities, wasted talent, and frustrated genius!

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